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POLITICS, ETHNICITY AND CONFLICT IN POST INDEPENDENT ACHOLILAND, UGANDA 1962-2006

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DEDICATION

For my Mother Eseza Tanga, my father Y. Tanga, wife Brenda, children: Jenkins
Obbo-Tanga, Collins Tanga, Nyaburu Irene and Uncle Bill Owollo.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

ADF	-	Allied Democratic Army
ARLPI	-	Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiatives
DP	-	Democratic Party
FEDEMU	-	Uganda Democratic Freedom Movement
FOBA	-	Force Obote Back Again
FRONASA	-	Front for National Salvation
FUNA	-	Former Uganda National Army
GSA	-	General Security Agency
HSM II	-	Holy Spirit Movement II
HSMF	-	Holy Spirit Movement Forces
KAR	-	Kings African Rifles
KY	-	Kabaka Yekka(-Kabaka Alone) Party
LRA	-	Lords Resistance Army
MPs	-	Members of Parliament
NALU	-	National Army for the Liberation of Uganda
NASA	-	National Security Agency
NCC	-	National Consultative Council
NOM	-	Ninth October Movement
NRA	-	National Resistance Army
NRM	-	National Resistance Movement
OAU	-	Organisation of African Unity

PRA	-	Peoples Redemption Army
SRB	-	State Research Bureau
SPLM	-	Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement
U.Shs	-	Uganda Shillings
UDCM/A	-	United Democratic Christian Movement/Army
UFA	-	Uganda Freedom Army
UFM	-	Uganda Freedom Movement
UNLA	-	Uganda National Liberation Army
UNLF	-	Uganda National Liberation Front
UNRF II	-	Uganda National Rescue Front Part II
UNRF	-	Uganda National Rescue Front
UPA	-	Uganda Peoples Army
UPC	-	Uganda Peoples Congress
UPDA	-	Uganda Peoples Democratic Army
UPDF	-	Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (New name for National Resistance Army)
UPDM	-	Uganda Peoples Democratic Movement
UPM	-	Uganda Patriotic Movement
USA	-	Uganda Salvation Army
WHO	-	World Health Organisation
WNBF	-	West Nile Bank Front



Glossary

- Acholi - People who inhabit Acholiland
- Acholiland - Current districts of Pader, Gulu and Kitgum that is
Home to the Acholi
- Gang - Village in Acholi or home
- Baganda - The people of Buganda
- Kabaka - King of Buganda

Abstract

This dissertation examines the extent to which conflict in post-colonial Acholiland is largely a product of the political dynamics of successive post-colonial regimes, including the extensive manipulation of politicized ethnicity and ethnic stereotyping rather than the age-old ethnic differences emanating from the region's history. Acholiland lies in the Northern part of Uganda.

Unlike the other East African states of Kenya and Tanzania that have enjoyed relative peace since their independence in the 1960s, Uganda has had a long conflictual history since 1962. The citizens of Uganda only enjoyed few years of relative peace and stability between 1962 and 1966. Between 1966 and 2006, one part or another of Uganda has experienced years of conflict accompanied by instability and political turmoil resulting from the failure to resolve political differences using political-civil means. The Ugandan political leadership after independence has failed to work out a basic political consensus on the basis of which political institutions can be built to resolve political conflicts, short of physical force. The net effect of all this was to bring the Uganda army on the stage of Uganda politics. Since 1962 the army has been used as an instrument of policy to resolve what basically was/is a domestic struggle for power. In this entire process, various ethnic groups have been victims of the cycle of violence. Since 1986 until 2006, war has ravaged Acholiland in northern Uganda to a greater extent than any other part of Uganda. The Uganda army (The National Resistance Army) (NRM), later renamed the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF), has since engaged one insurgent group after another in Acholiland. The debilitating consequences of the 20 year old conflict in Acholiland and the

search for peace are subjects of growing scholarship. This work on conflict in post-independent Acholiland (1962-2006) seeks to contribute to this scholarship.

While it has been postulated that conflict in Acholiland is largely because the Acholi are warlike people and are therefore more prone to war than other ethnic groups in Uganda, it is argued here that conflict in this area is largely a product of the political dynamics of successive post-colonial regimes, including the extensive manipulation of politicized ethnicity and ethnic stereotyping.

As the study shows, ethnicity by itself is not a problem and ethnicity can be harnessed for the stability and development of any country. However, once politicized and militarily instrumentalized, as has been the case in post-independent Uganda, ethnicity then becomes a vehicle for violent conflict. This then makes ethnically informed practices the main means through which war and its effects are interpreted and acted upon. The study also traces the history of Acholiland in the colonial period to identify the major trends that shaped its development and contributed to the region's turbulent post-colonial experience.

INTRODUCTION

Uganda has now been independent for forty-seven years (1962-2009). In these years as an independent country, various parts of the country have been in a state of political crisis and conflict. Unlike most African states where the political environments settled down to a greater or lesser degree after independence, Uganda has experienced extended periods of violent internal strife, similar to that found in Chad, Sudan and Somalia. While there is some relative political quiet in countries like Sudan at the cost of personalized dictatorial rule, the northern part of Uganda remained in a state of political-military strife and turmoil between 1986 and 2006, as one insurgent group or another rose to challenge the ruling National Resistance Movement government in Kampala. All such insurgent groups have been militarily organized and equipped in their challenge to the central government.

Indeed, as E.A Brett has rightly summed up the post independent Uganda political situation, “Bullets rather than ballots have dominated politics in Uganda, where two governments have been removed by coups (i.e. Obote I-1971 and Obote II – 1985), one by foreign invasion (i.e. the 1979 Tanzania-Uganda National Liberation Front invasion] and another by armed rebellion (i.e. the NRA and Museveni rebellion of 1981-85 that culminated in the overthrow of Tito Okello).¹ Consequently, Uganda has had eight governments since independence in which only the first government (1962-1971) was formed by peaceful constitutional means.

¹E.A. Brett, “Neutralising the Use of Force in Uganda: The Role of the Military in Politic, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 33, 1 (1995), 129-152.

Overall, the citizens of Uganda enjoyed only four years of relative peace and stability between 1962 and 1966. In the years after 1966, Ugandans were exposed to a level of violence that far exceeds that of any other people in eastern Africa.² Well over one million Ugandans were killed between 1966 and 1985 through violence that was invoked for political purposes.³ Different explanations have been advanced for this unfortunate history with regard to Uganda, ranging from failure of the post-independent political leaders to integrate the country into one unit,⁴ from religious loyalties and ideologies,⁵ to regional and superpower influences,⁶ to ethnic antipathies and chauvinism.⁷ This work respects these different views and academic positions but will emphasize the importance of post-colonial politics, the role of ethnicity and especially how politicized ethnicity and ethnic stereotyping have been fundamental in post-independent conflicts in Uganda and particularly in the north of the country.

When S. P. Huntington worked out a model to account for political instability in developing areas, he particularly attributed this phenomenon to the absence of viable political institutions which can domesticate power.⁸ By his criteria, a political system may be modernized, in terms of material and social

² The political-military situation in Uganda remained volatile, to the extent that almost every region has since 1966 been exposed to violent rebel activity or internal disagreement leading to chaos. For instance the 1966 crisis in Buganda, the Amin coup and massacre of civilians in Acholi and Lango (1971-1979), insurgent rebel activities in Teso 1986-1987, rebel activities in West Nile 1981-1982, 1987-1990, and rebel activities in Acholiland 1986-2006.

³ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994), 3.

⁴ A. Omara-Otunnu, "The Dynamics of Conflict in Uganda", in Oliver Furley (Ed.), *Conflict in Africa*, (London: I.B Taurus Publishers, 1995), 223-236.

⁵ A. B. Mujaju, "The Political Crisis of Church Institutions in Uganda", *African Affairs*, 73, 299, (January 1976), 11-18.

⁶ P. Woodward, *Rivalry and Conflict in Northern East Africa*, (London: The Centre for Security and Conflict Studies, 1987)

⁷ A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: The Making of a Military Ethnocracy*, (London: Sage Publications 1975)

⁸ S.P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, (United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 1969), Chap. 1

development, without being developed short of physical use of force if there are no generally acceptable political formulae for resolving conflicts. Uganda's post-independent politics exhibits the above, namely, being modernized but with no generally acceptable political formulae for resolving conflicts- or transforming from one government to another- short of use of physical force.

Since independence, as D. Mudoola rightly notes, "the Ugandan political leadership have failed to work out a basic political consensus on the basis of which political institutions can be built to resolve political differences short of use physical force".⁹ Unfortunately, force is not a state monopoly in Uganda but a means by which political groups seek to establish their hegemony over other competing political groups. The end result of this is conflict, as one group tries to impose its policies over others, while other political groups fight back to access state authority and resources. Conflict in Acholiland should be seen in this context.

In addition, there is the fragility of Uganda political institutions, which can be attributed to a highly fragmented political elite operating in socio-political situations that are highly polarized. Ugandan political elite have consequently worked out political formulae, not as a means through which conflicts can be resolved for the ultimate good of the political system as such, but as tactical weapons for taking care of interests articulated by the political elite's interests peculiar to themselves, or the social forces they purport to represent.

⁹ D. Mudoola, "Post Colonial Politics in Uganda: An Interpretation", *MAWAZO*, 6, 2 (Dec. 1985), 19-29.

In Uganda since 1962, the constitutional formula has been periodically used to advance selfish interests. When the constitution was not thus manipulated, then ethnicity was exploited for the same ends, hence its politicization. Wherever there has been a change of government in Uganda, the army has been used by those who have control over it to espouse selfish-personal interests and the interests of a particular social group. While one may argue that this was a direct outcome of the divide and rule policy that the colonial state in Uganda adopted in managing local challenges to power, post-independent political elites should have known that the end result of such a ploy would always be conflict. The British, who saw northern Uganda as a problem area, described it initially as a “disturbed hostile territory” and treated it as an occupied territory until 1921. In some parts like Karamoja, the Karamoja Act of 1964 even criminalized any forms of gathering.¹⁰ Yet, the southern part of Uganda, by contrast, was favoured and protected from other regions.

While we contend here that ethnic identity and politics in Uganda are directly and indirectly linked to the colonial processes be as the colonial state, not only utilized ethnic politics, but also left in place an institutional apparatus that promoted ethnic identity- the political elite that took over the reigns of state power after 1962 simply exacerbated ethnic polarization leading to a series of conflicts, including that in the current state of conflict in northern Uganda, with its epicenter in Acholiland.

¹⁰ J. Barber, “The Moving Frontier of British Imperialism in Northern Uganda, 1898-1919”, *Uganda Journal*, 29 (1965), 27-43.

In the few years after independence when Ugandans enjoyed relative peace, such as between 1962 and 1966, it was not necessarily because the leaders were committed to what Ali Mazrui calls the “politics of reconciliation”,¹¹ but simply because none of the leaders and the forces they represented then felt strong enough to challenge the independence constitutional arrangements or because they did not have enough control of the military to effect change unconstitutionally. Once the equation of power tilted in their favour, Ugandan rulers consistently resorted to unconstitutional means to access and exert political power. For instance, after introducing the 1967 Constitution and abolishing Kingdoms recognised in the original independence constitution, the Buganda kingdom that had frustrated most of Obote’s designs was no longer a threat. As D. Mudoola put it, “with the introduction of the 1967 Republican Constitution and ‘Move to the Left’, the rules of the game helped not only to regularise and legitimize Obote’s seizure of power, but to bring the Uganda army on the stage of Uganda politics since the army was then used as an instrument of policy to resolve what basically was a domestic struggle for power”.¹²

The net effect of this on Uganda’s politics was that Parliament, political parties and other civilian institutions, as arenas for resolving political conflicts, were relegated to the background and were later used for legitimizing political courses of action already decided on by the political elite (in this case Obote) and his cronies. Later leaders after Obote did not deviate much from such unconstitutional means to cling on to power.

¹¹A. Mazrui, “Violent Constitutionalism in Uganda”, in *Government and Opposition*, 11, 4 (1967).

¹²D. Mudoola, “Post Colonial Politics in Uganda, 20.

Yoweri Museveni's government (1986-2009) has made several constitutional amendments to help retain political power indefinitely. For instance in 2005, Parliament ultimately amended the 1995 Constitution to remove "five year term limits",¹³ to allow President Museveni to contest for presidency in 2010. Museveni categorically stated that the lifting of term limits was not necessarily in his favour but would be of benefit to any contender for the presidency. At the same time, Museveni portrayed himself as the only man with a "vision" for a prosperous Uganda.¹⁴ Besides, he has also increased the number of districts in Uganda from 45 when he came to power in 1986 to 83 in 2006, as a way to promote his nominees as district administrators and supporters as Members of Parliament, while arguing that that the new districts are meant to bring services closer to the people. However, as current Minister of Lands – Hon Omara-Atubo rightly put it,

Ethnic manipulation has been done through the creation of districts whose purposes is not bringing services nearer to the people but to contain tribal sentiments by dividing up a group of people.¹⁵

Indeed, as opposition politician Betty Among also emphasized, "districts play a role in retention of political power. District creation is not always a demand by the people concerned but a political move geared at appeasing a group of politicians".¹⁶

¹³ The 1995 Uganda Constitution had term limits as one of the many ways of protecting Ugandans from over-zealous rulers who do not relinquish power. After winning elections in 2001, Museveni would have served the mandatory two terms by 2010 and would not stand for re-election. The government bribed members of Parliament with 5 million Uganda shs (approximately 3000 dollars in 2006) to amend the constitution by removing term limits. He therefore qualifies to run for the presidency indefinitely.

¹⁴ S. Makara, "Uganda's 2006 Multiparty Elections: Consolidating Democracy and Building Peace?" *East African Journal of Peace & Human Rights*, 13, 1 (2007), 54-80.

¹⁵ *Parliamentary Hansard*, Kampala, (July 20th 2005).

¹⁶ *Parliamentary Hansard*, Kampala, (July 20th 2005).

The political history of Uganda is rife with several examples where political leaders in control of state organs devise ways of eliminating others (especially opposition) from access to both political power and economic resources. Once one group takes control of the state, the highly fragmented political elites work out a formula for balancing the political forces and adhere to a formula that benefits them. The other competing factions are then left with no other option but to organize militarily to gain access to political power and economic resources. The end result of all this is conflict like that in northern Uganda, especially Acholiland, between 1986 and 2006.

The Acholi homeland in northern Uganda has been the arena of conflict since 1986. The Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF), commanded until 2006 by General Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, who is also the president of Uganda, has fought different insurgent groups, such as the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA) under Odong Latek, the Holy Spirit Movement Forces (HSMF) under Alice Auma Lakwena, the Holy Spirit Movement II of Severino Lukoya, and the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement (LRA/M) of Joseph Kony. Until 2006, the LRA/M of Joseph Kony remained the most resistant to defeat despite government's highly praised military operations, such as "Operation Lightning Thunder" in December 2003.

As shall be delineated in this study, the causes and consequences of armed conflict in northern Uganda, particularly in Acholiland, the reasons for it and the "facts" about it all differ, depending on who is telling the story or writing about it. The dominant explanation given at the official level for the persistent

conflict in the Acholi area is that the political upheavals, including civil wars, rebellion and associated massive displacement of people and dispossession which have bedeviled Uganda (Acholiland included) can, to a large extent, be attributed to ethnicity, ethnic diversity, ethnic rivalries and the effect of British colonialism. At an unofficial level, conflict in this area is perceived as the outcome of the cultural and militant background of the Acholi people.

This study considers such explanations to be partial simplistic, and unable to provide a comprehensive appreciation of the causes of political conflicts in Uganda mainly because they are not grounded in a thorough understanding of historical reality that shaped the history of Uganda in general and Acholiland in particular. The conflict in Acholiland should be seen as part of Uganda's history of conflict since independence in 1962. This study shall, therefore, provide the necessary historical context that should assist in a clear understanding of Acholiland's post-colonial experience. The study is organized in seven (7) chapters.

This chapter gives a concise statement on the scope of the thesis and the central arguments to be pursued. It specifies the problem to be investigated, the purpose of the study and the research methodology.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The political history of Independent Africa is replete with many accounts of political conflicts which have attended the course of the continent's political life. Notable among these political conflicts are the Biafran civil war in Nigeria of 1967-1970, which pitted the Ibo people of south-eastern Nigeria against the Federal Government; the civil war in Angola that saw Jonas Savimbi's guerilla group, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), fighting the ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA); and the conflicts in Burundi and Rwanda in which the protagonists have been the Hutu and Tutsi; the only two ethnic groups, or perhaps more accurately, occupational groups constituting the population of each of the two countries.

There was also the civil war in Sudan fought between the mainly Moslem (Arabic-speaking) North and the Christian (African) South which sought autonomy and independence under the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM); the Somali crisis where conflict is predominantly at the level of clans; the recurring crises in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the two decade-long conflict in northern Uganda with its epicentre in Acholiland. Some African

leaders have described the continent of Africa as synonymous with difficulties. In a speech to business forum in Johannesburg, former president of Zambia Kenneth Kaunda described Africa as “a continent at cross-roads because of its failed economic policies and conflicts arising out of bad leadership”,¹⁷ while Museveni of Uganda expressed pity that Africa lags far behind South America and Europe. Conflicts that have bedeviled the continent for years need a lasting remedy.

A number of Scholars who have focused on this phenomenon of political conflicts have argued that their cause is the very fact of the existence of various communities in the same nation-state and the hatred emanating from that situation.¹⁸ David Weeks, for example, contends that conflict is an inevitable outcome of diversity.¹⁹ This study will argue to the contrary.

In Uganda, the population has been exposed to a level of violence that far exceeds that of any other people in Eastern Africa.²⁰ Since Uganda obtained independence from Britain in 1962, the people of Acholi have had a varied political experience. In the Obote regimes (1962-1971) and (1980-1985), the Acholi dominated the rank and file in the army and also occupied a number of high-ranking military and political offices. This changed in 1986 with the rise to power of the National Resistance Army/Movement led by current President

¹⁷*The Daily Monitor*, 5 January 2006, 3.

¹⁸ Beyene, “Decentralization as a Strategy for Resolving the National Problem: The Ethiopian Experience” in the 18th AAPAM Conference on “Decentralisation as a Principle of Democratic Governance in Africa; Issues and Options”, Nairobi, Kenya 17–21 March, 1977, 4.

¹⁹ T.A. Imblogibe, “Conflict in Africa: Roles of OAU Sub-regional Organisations”, Lectures at the National War College, Abuja, 17 February, 1998, 1.

²⁰ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*, 3.

Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. Since 1986, the Acholi homeland in northern Uganda has been the stage of armed conflict although a fragile peace has obtained since 2006, when peace talks moderated by the Government of South Sudan began. The debilitating consequences of this twenty year conflict and the search for peace are subjects of growing scholarship. This work on conflict in post-colonial Acholiland (1962-2006) seeks to contribute to this scholarship.

AIM

After a background chapter on the pre-colonial history of Acholi, the thesis will trace the colonial history of Acholiland to identify the major trends that shaped its development during the colonial period and contributed to the region's turbulent post-colonial experience. The study argues that conflict in post-colonial Acholiland is a product of the political dynamics of successive post-colonial regimes, including the extensive manipulation of politicized ethnicity and ethnic stereotyping, rather than the result of age-old ethnic differences emanating from the region's history.

RATIONALE

Using conflict in Acholiland as a micro-study, we hope to show to what extent the colonial period and the effects of British "divide and rule" policy contributed to post-colonial conflict in Africa and how far such conflicts are, in the end, conflicts over political power or access to economic resources. We contend that, while no doubt a contributing factor, ethnic difference is not in itself a

cause of armed conflict but is rather an instrument of mobilization for political leaders. Equally, the role of religion in conflict, as with the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement (LRA/M) of Joseph Kony or Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF)²¹ is basically more a mobilization strategy than a cause, as some of the works reviewed tend to indicate.

This study investigates how the use of the state as an instrument of material acquisition has meant that those who have benefited over the years from the structure of access have used every trick available, including mobilizing ethnic support, to sustain themselves in power. Likewise, those who want to access political power have resorted to the same means, leading to conflict.

In Africa, as Chabal and Daloz have noted, there is no well-defined separation between the political realm, on the one hand, and the more economic, social, religious and cultural areas, on the other. It is difficult to know what is or is not political, partly because the vision of politics is both inclusive and more extensive than in the West.²² The pervasive role that the state plays in the economic and distribution processes attracts competition and later conflicts. It has become a rule in Africa that to develop or benefit from the state, one must be closely related to or otherwise associated with, those in power. The competition to acquire power is often militarized, hence conflicts. In Africa generally, it is expected that politics will lead to personal enrichment for the

²¹ The Holy Spirit Movement was a rebel group led by Alice Auma Lakwena from Gulu opposed to the NRA/NRM of Museveni. After its defeat in 1987 at Jinja, Joseph Kony began a new movement he called the Lords Resistance Army.

²² P. Chabal & J. Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, (Oxford and Bloomington: The International African Institute/James Currey/Indiana University Press, 1999), 52.

political leader and members of his ethnic group. Consequently, as each leader of Uganda came into power, as Okalany notes, the members of that particular ethnic group would rejoice saying “it is our turn to eat,” or “we have fallen into things”. Indeed, the key positions in government and other departments are dished out first to “tribesmen” before the other ethnic groups are remembered.²³ Thus, writing on ethnicity and political conflicts in Nigeria, Cletus Chukwa contends that “political conflicts and other socio-economic setbacks stem from ethnic differences.”²⁴

In his study on “the Rwandese political tragedy”, Wanjala Nasongo criticizes D. Kamukama’s position on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda for emphasising the role of ethnicity. Wanjala believes that the tragedy was the result of a combination of factors.²⁵ Similarly, Gasarase also believes that “the Hutu-Tutsi hatred “explanation is too facile” and that “some knowledgeable individuals who keep harping on it do so for a variety of reasons”. He argues that the tragedy in Rwanda needs to be understood in terms of deeper historical reasons and the failure by Rwanda’s post-colonial leadership to unite the masses rather than simply that the Hutu hated the Tutsi.²⁶ The present study argues that ethnicity is neither inherently conflictual nor necessarily deleterious even in a heterogeneous state like Uganda.

²³ D. H. Okalany, “Ethnicity and the Culture of Eating in Uganda, 1962-1986”, in B.A. Ogot (Ed.), *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Democracy in Africa*, (Maseno: Desktop Pub. Unit, 1996), 188.

²⁴ C. Chukwa, “Ethnicity and Political Conflicts in Nigeria”, in B. A. Ogot and P. G. Okoth (Eds.), *Conflict in Contemporary African*, (Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, 2000), 143.

²⁵ S. W. Nasongo, “Resource Allocation And The Crisis of Political Conflict on Africa: Beyond The Inter-ethnic Hatred Thesis”, in P. G. Okoth and B.A. Ogot (Eds.), *Conflict in Contemporary Africa*, 48.

²⁶ C. Gasarase, “The Rwandan Conflict: Sources, Evaluation and Implications for Refugee Reparation and National Reconciliation and Reconstruction”, in CODESRIA Conference on Academic Freedom, Social Research and Conflict Resolution in the Countries of the Great Lakes”, (Arusha, Tanzania 4th –7th Sept. 1995), 1.

ACHOLILAND'S HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE

In the mid-to-late 17th century, Acholiland was essentially a frontier region where central Sudanic and Eastern Nilotic worlds met. As Atkinson notes, the first was a series of Eastern Nilotic encroachments from about 1000 to 1600 into Central Sudanic-dominated areas north of Acholi. Second, during the same period numerous groups of the Teso-Karimojong (or Ateker) branch of Eastern Nilotic speakers came into Acholi from the East. Most settled in eastern Acholi, but some made their way as far as the Kilak-Lamola region in the extreme west. Third, Western Nilotic Luo speakers made their first appearance in Acholi, probably during the early to mid-fifteenth century.²⁷ Eastern Nilotic Ateker were numerous and settled throughout Acholiland. Today, Acholiland is inhabited, not only by people claiming Acholi origin, but also by some Madi and Labwor whose ethnic composition is quite different from the Acholi.²⁸ This illustrates that Acholi as conceived today is home to different ethnic groups as result of migrations.

The argument we advance here is that ethnicity can be harnessed to enhance productive goals and objectives if properly guided. It is the politicization of ethnicity that is dangerous. Politicization of ethnicity often takes place in a situation characterized by inequitable structures of access. Such structures give rise to the emergence of an “in-group” and “out-groups,” with the latter trying to break down the structures of inequality and the former responding by building barriers to access that ensure the continuation of its privileged

²⁷ R. R Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity* 63. See also R.R. Atkinson, “A History of the Western Acholi of Uganda c. 1675-1900: A Study in the Utilization of Oral Data”, (PhD Diss. Northwestern University, 1978), 123.

²⁸ J.B. Webster, “State Formation and Fragmentation in Agago”, in J.M Onyango-Ku-Odongo & J.B. Webster (Eds.), *The Central Lwo during the Aconya*, (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1976), 222.

position.²⁹ The common result is armed conflict for power. Conflict that has bedeviled post-colonial Acholiland since independence has features of all these anomalies.

This study will be guided by the following critical questions: What are the historical forces that shaped ethnic identity in Uganda in general and Acholiland in particular? To what extent have the Acholi as a distinct and collective ethnic identity been a factor in Uganda's national politics since 1962? How has ethnicity been politicized and stereotyped in Uganda? Why has Acholiland been the centre of continuous conflict since 1986? To what extent can conflicts in post-colonial Acholiland be connected to its particular colonial history and experience in post-colonial transformation? How have ethnic mistrust and complex traditional religious practices of the Acholi exacerbated conflict? How can ethnic rivalries and conflicts in Uganda and Africa generally be contained or neutralized? What role have external forces played in conflict in Acholi? And to what extent can the conflict be attributed to failures of post colonial politics and leadership as opposed to the impact of the colonial heritage?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Conflict in post-colonial Acholiland is an interesting case in its own right, if only because of its very destructive nature. Different accounts have been given as to its origins and why it has persisted. Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni, has

²⁹ W. O. Oyugi, "Politicised Ethnicity and Conflict in Kenya: A Periodic Phenomenon", in *Proceedings of the Conference on African Conflicts: Their Management, Resolution and Post-Conflict Resolution*, (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2000), 34.

argued that ethnicity as a social identity has been at the centre of the conflict.³⁰

This study is intended to investigate this claim by tracing the pre-colonial and colonial history of Acholiland and its interaction with the rest of Uganda in the colonial and post-colonial periods. The study will help contextualize the “ethnicity problem” and determine its impact on post-colonial society and politics in Uganda. Thus, the study hopes to contribute to current theoretical debates on post-colonial conflicts through a historical analysis of the local experience of Acholiland.

SIGNIFICANCE

The study of conflict in post-colonial Acholiland will contribute to a greater understanding of its root causes. It will interrogate standard explanations that emphasize the “North-South divide,” the Acholi as a “martial tribe,” the “war-like nature of the Acholi,” or the claim that post-colonial conflict in Acholiland arose because “the northerners, in general, and, the Acholi in particular, have dominated the political space in Uganda for a long time”.³¹

Uganda has experienced more than twenty insurgencies against the current government. Rebellion in West Nile, under the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF) and Uganda Rescue Front (URF), has long ended. In the Western region, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and the National Liberation of Uganda (NALU) have also been defeated. The Peoples Redemption Army, claimed by Government to be fronted by opposition leader, Dr. Kiiza Besigye, has never fired a single-shot and is, therefore- if it even exists at all- not a threat to peace

³⁰ Y.K. Museveni, with E. Kanyogonya & K. Shillington, *Sowing The Mustard Seed: The Struggle For Freedom and Democracy in Uganda*, (London: Macmillan, 1997).

³¹ *Drum East Magazine*, October 1985.

and security. In the Teso and Lango regions, the Uganda Peoples Army (UPA), under Peter Otai, and the Force Obote Back Again (FOBA), respectively, have long been crushed. Armed rebellion has, however, persisted in Acholiland since 1986, under different groups. Currently, the Uganda government has failed to wipe out the Lord's Resistance Army rebels under Joseph Kony. The persistence of rebellion in this area and its humanitarian consequences make it an important subject worth studying.

Lastly, but most importantly, this study will contribute to the scholarship on conflicts in Africa by, highlighting the role played by British colonial policy in Uganda, especially the effects of its division of labour, its declaration of Teso, West Nile and Acholiland as recruitment area for the army and police, and its economic and social marginalization of these areas, as well as how post-colonial leaders exploited this situation for their own selfish ends, leading to conflict. In addition, it will show the historical role that elders played in this society to sustain or re-establish peace, and how the current situation can be helped through the efforts of government and local traditional leaders. Hopefully, this study will stimulate further research that incorporates in serious historical perspective on the dynamics of conflict as well as a critical assessment of the role that ethnicity plays in such conflicts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Overview

The modern state of Uganda assumed its present geopolitical identity between 1890 and 1926 as a product of European (British) colonialism. On the eve of its independence from the British in 1962, colonial Uganda was in many ways well-equipped to embark on successful independent statehood.³² A resource-rich country, colonial Uganda had long been paying the costs of its administration and, as early as 1916, was no longer a burden to the British tax payer. Between 1945 and 1960, Ugandan peasants paid over £118 million to the administration and development of their country. After independence, unlike Kenya, Uganda attracted no substantial foreign investment or aid but, unlike many other dependent ex-colonies, Uganda's subsistence sector was not only self-supporting but very strong, with seventy five percent of cultivated land devoted to this end.

Instead, after 1964, Ugandans have been exposed to levels of violence and internal conflicts that far exceed that of any other country in East Africa. Conflict continued up to 2006 in northern Uganda, especially in Acholi, and although a fragile peace has come to this area since, the effects of two decades of war make sustainable peace both difficult and uncertain. Internal conflicts in Uganda have thus marked the country since its very inception as a post-colonial state.

³²A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964 –1985*, 3. See also H. Kyemba, *A State of Blood: The inside Story of Idi Amin*, (Kampala: Fountain publishers, 1977), 69.

The high incidence of socio-political conflicts in Uganda has generated considerable scholarly literature.

(a) The Legacy of British Colonialism: Ethnic Compartmentalization, Uneven Development and Post-colonial Conflicts in Uganda

Some scholars have attributed post-colonial instability and conflicts in Uganda to the legacy of British colonialism in Uganda, especially the effects of the British colonial policy of “divide and rule”. Tarsis Kabwegyere gives a concise introduction to the “divide and rule” theme and how it laid the foundation for post-colonial conflicts. As he writes:

The differences among (Africans) were aggravated by the colonial practice of ‘divide and rule’, a practice that was designed to reduce social interaction and the emergence of a collective consciousness among the oppressed. At policy level, it promoted disunity, ethnicity and parochialism which sowed the seeds of conflicts in the post-colonial period.³³

Similarly, Bruce Berman has argued that “the colonial state’s strategy of fragmentation and isolation of distinct tribal units promoted ethnic competition and conflict.”³⁴ On his part, Mugaju states:

During the colonial period, the problems of ethnicity were compounded by economic distortions. British colonialism created regional imbalances and ethnic specialization. Southern, and to some extent, eastern Uganda became regions of peasant production of cotton and coffee. ...others such as, Acholi, Teso and to some extent West Nile became catchment areas for the armed forces.³⁵

³³ T. B. Kabwegyere, *The Politics of State Formation: The Nature and Effects of Colonialism in Uganda*, (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1977), 44.

³⁴ B. Berman, “Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism”, *Africa Affairs*, 97 (1998), 328.

³⁵ J. Mugaju, *Uganda’s Age of Reform: A Critical Overview*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1999), 14-15. See also M. Doornbos, “The Uganda Crisis and the National Question”, in H. Holdger and M. Twaddle, (Eds.), *Uganda Now*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1988).

This kind of representation has become a common place depiction of British colonialism, with Bruce Berman, Lwanga-Lunyiigo, Phares Mutibwa, Mahmood Mamdani, Ginyera Pincywa, Museveni, Martin Doornbos, and Onadipe and Lord, Mugaju echoing it.³⁶

While it seems indisputable that ethnic incompatibility and polarization are basically a product of British colonialism and enabled the British to dominate and economically exploit the colonial state of Uganda, the inheritors of the colonial state and the politics pursued thereafter made the bad situation worse. As we shall argue, the first generation of post-colonial rulers was more interested in power than justice and democracy. The way they manipulated the ethnic compartments that the British created largely accounts for Uganda's recurring post-colonial conflicts, a feature that both Kabwegyere and Berman seem to neglect in their works.³⁷ It therefore appears reasonable to argue that if Britain could govern Uganda in comparative peace for nearly seventy years, subsequent indigenous rulers, knowing local problems more intimately than the British, could, at the very least, equal that record. Since they abjectly and

³⁶These scholars contend that conflict in post-independence Uganda is a legacy of British Colonialism and especially British policy of divide and rule. See B. Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State"; P. Mutibwa, *Uganda since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hope*, (London: Hurst & Co., 1992); M. Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*, (London: Heinemann, 1976); Ginyera-Pincywa, "Is there a Northern Question?" in Kumar Rupesinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (London: James Currey, 1989); Lwanga-Lunyiigo, "The Colonial Roots of Internal Conflict", in Kumar Rupesinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (London: James Currey, 1989); Onadipe A. and Lord D., "Conciliation resources: African Media and conflict", New York: Conciliation resources (Online). Available from <http://www.c-rorg/occ.papers/af-media>; Y. K. Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle For Freedom and Democracy in Uganda*, (London: Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997); M. Doornbos, "The Uganda Crisis and National Question", in H. Hansen & M. Twaddle (Eds.), *Uganda Now*, (London, James Currey, 1988).

³⁷ T.B. Kabwegyere, *The Politics of State Formation*, 44. See also B. Berman, "Ethnicity Patronage and the African State", 144-160.

tragically failed to do so, an explanation must then be sought in their motives and performance.

Samwiri Lwanga-Lunyiigo traces the historical roots and the structural causes of the reproduction of violence in Uganda and argues strongly that the administrative boundaries enacted by the British were to reproduce ethnicity where policies provided for the institutionalization of parochial tribally-oriented local government. He then contends that “this constitutional division made the unity of Uganda extremely difficult to achieve, and was to be a potential cause of conflict in the post-independence decade”.³⁸

Whereas it is true that British colonial policies had both favoured and aided the continuation of tribal loyalties while blocking the development of supra-tribal links, attributing the current conflicts to this aspect alone needs new examination and modification. Lwanga Lunyiingo treats the colonial period as a monolithic whole and makes no allowance for any other explanation or even the changes Uganda’s post-colonial leaders would have initiated to alleviate the situation of conflicts. Lunyiigo, like Kabwegyere, neglects the important part that weak post-colonial leaders have since played by manipulating the colonial divisions to their favour. He does not find anything wrong with the way post-colonial politics was handled to result in the current conflicts. Our study will try to go beyond the part played by colonialism even when we respect its contribution to the current crisis as well.

³⁸ S. Lwanga-Lunyiigo, “The Colonial Roots of Internal Conflicts” in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, 24-41.

Martin Doornbos extends the argument further by emphasizing how the uneven development engineered by the British made the northern region in general, Acholiland in particular, a source of colonial labour; thereby creating the current regional economic disparity which is a source of grievance and conflict. In the course of blaming British rule for the excesses of Uganda's presidents Idi Amin (1971-1979) and Milton Obote (1980-1985), he identifies "a legacy of the colonial regime that had sought to create a power balance, divide and rule model through concentrating military and police recruitment on Acholi, Lango and West Nile in the North, away from the economic, educational and administrative central region of the country".³⁹

Similarly, Phares Mutibwa believes that "army and police recruitment was reserved for northerners and people for the East lest Baganda became too strong and colonial rule was endangered".⁴⁰ Mutibwa also highlights the negative legacy of British colonialism in relation to the arbitrariness of Uganda's boundaries; that is boundaries that ensured that each tribe was an independent administrative unit. He accuses British colonialists of introducing new class formations unknown in Uganda before. Although he does not define these classes, it is possible that they embrace what Twaddle refers to as civil servants, cash crop farmers and traders.⁴¹ Whereas it is historically true that social change accompanies economic change and that these particular classes can be said to represent beneficiaries as much as victims- albeit frustrated

³⁹ M. Doornbos, "The Uganda Crisis and the National Question", 265.

⁴⁰ P. Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence*, 6.

⁴¹ M. Twaddle, & H. Hansen, "The Changing State of Uganda", in M. Twaddle & H. Hansen (Eds.), *Developing Uganda*, (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), 229.

beneficiaries- of economic change, colonial conflicts in Uganda cannot be explained by relying only on the role played by British colonialism because it narrows the scope.

In explaining why the National Resistance Movement under Yoweri Museveni resorted to guerrilla warfare in the 1980s against the government of Milton Obote, Mutibwa suggests that they had to fight “the system” which had been created by the colonial power and then inherited at independence, perfected by Obote and matured under Amin’s dictatorship. In this study, the impact of colonial rule is one important dimension which will be investigated. However, it is insufficient in itself to explain contemporary conflicts. Both colonial realities, and especially post-colonial political transformations, have to be analysed. The ethnification of the army, for instance, is what made it an instrument of coercion and a centre of ethnic politics in the post-colonial period.

Samwiri Rubaraza Karugire,⁴² and Kasozi,⁴³ in their respective works, have described at some length how ethnic, religious and social inequality has led to conflicts in post-colonial Uganda. Karugire, in particular, traces the chequered political history of Uganda from the attainment of independence in 1962 to the military coup by Tito Okello that overthrew Obote for the second time in 1985. Tito Okello had, until 1985, been commander of the Uganda National Liberation Army and a close confidant of Milton Obote. He argues that disunity on ethnic and religious grounds and the administrative isolation of Uganda’s component

⁴² S. R. Karugire, *The Roots of Instability in Uganda*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1996), 4.

⁴³ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*, 19.

parts during the colonial period were the basic foundations upon which political instability was built. He then concludes that this situation was exacerbated by an ethnically unbalanced army which was largely illiterate. Although he gives a very illuminating account of Uganda's history, his book stops in 1985, thereby leaving out a whole 20 years of conflict in Acholiland. Karugire does not critique in depth the nature of post-colonial politics and especially how the ethnic compartments left behind by the British have since been manipulated to result in the current conflict.

For his part, Kasozi attributes the major causes of conflicts in Uganda to social inequality, the failure to develop legitimate conflict resolution mechanisms, and factors such as lack of a common language, religious sectarianism and gender inequality. Both works, brilliant as far as they go, still fall short of our basic objective to examine the northern Uganda conflict as a product of the political dynamics of post-colonial regimes, and especially the extensive manipulation of politicized ethnicity and ethnic stereotyping.

Firimoon Banugire, in his essay entitled "Uneven and Unbalanced Development: Development Strategies and Conflict", raises questions concerning the relationship between uneven regional development, unbalanced development strategies and social conflicts in Uganda. He contends that, whereas the development potential of Uganda and its natural resource base are fairly unevenly distributed, regional differences in the level of development are largely because of development strategies pursued during the colonial period and reproduced after independence. Even when the northern region produced two

leaders in the persons of Obote (1962-1971, 1980-1985) and Idi Amin (1971-1979), the area still lagged behind economically. The essay clarifies how the economic marginalisation of northern Uganda, including Acholiland, makes it a center of economic grievances leading to conflicts.

Banugire then calls for fundamental political reforms, without which a progressive economy cannot be realized. He argues that a precondition to restore the economy is to build popular participation.⁴⁴ His emphasis on the economic development strategies adopted by post-colonial governments and their neglect of the North generally is essential to this study. The same economic explanation or dimension is also advanced at a more general level by Ritva Reinikk and Paul Collier.⁴⁵ Economic policies pursued in post-colonial Uganda are part of the nature of politics that our study will critique. This study analyses the economic marginalization of Acholiland both in the colonial and post-colonial period as a contributing factor to the current conflicts.

Y. Barongo examines the problem of ethnic pluralism versus political centralization in Uganda.⁴⁶ He argues that the phenomenon of excessive centralization of power in a multi-ethnic Uganda has been the source of conflict and instability since independence. This is because the base for political activity and decision making is narrowed down to a unifocal area which allows the participation of a small section of political elites. Secondly, since there is an

⁴⁴ F. Banugire, "Uneven and Un-balanced Development: Development Strategies and Conflict", in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (Oslo and London: James Currey, 1989), 18.

⁴⁵ R. Ritva and P. Collier, (Eds.), *Uganda's Recovery: The Role of Farms, Firms and Government*, (Washington D.C. and Kampala: The World Bank and Fountain Publishers, 2001), 16.

⁴⁶ Y. Barongo, "Ethnic pluralism and Political Centralization: The Basis of Political Conflict in Uganda", in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (Oslo and London: James Currey, 1989), 29.

absence of effective lower levels of participation, the struggle to gain access to political power at the centre becomes intense, leading to conflict. He then recommends political decentralization in order to absorb ethnic conflict. This contention that the violent conflicts bedeviling Uganda since 1966 are basically political in origin is in line with our study.

However, the fact that Uganda is a multi-ethnic society should not automatically mean that it is a state ripe for conflict. The point that should be given more thought is the way post-colonial leaders in Uganda have failed to harness the multi-ethnic state to progress and have, instead, pitted one group at a time against another in a manner that leads to a state of suspicion and animosity among the different ethnic groups. It is this manipulation and ethnic stereotyping that is our focus in this study and which is central to post-independence conflict not only in Acholiland, but Uganda more generally.

Kabumba Ijuka discusses ethnic conflicts within the Public Service, looking at how conflicts are pronounced at the top of the administrative hierarchy and how such conflicts are often related to political alignments. It maintains that politics and administration are very much inter-linked. Ijuka also shows how there is an overt policy in Uganda's politics of excluding some groups from decision-making processes and the negative stereotyping of other groups within the system. As he notes, "the present system and politics in Uganda tend to emphasize differences rather than similarities".⁴⁷ From Kabumba's exposition, we still find

⁴⁷ I. Kabumba, "Ethnic Conflict within the Public Service", in K Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (Oslo, London: James Currey, 1989), 16.

manipulation, ethnic stereotyping and how leaders in positions of authority use their powers to segregate the public service on the basis of ethnicity. In the long run, the conflict for political power is backed by members of ethnic groups so as to access economic resources. Although Kabumba's work is on the Public Service in Uganda, it will help inform our study on the political dynamics of Uganda more generally.

Okalany, on his part, argues strongly that ethnicity has played an important role in the political upheavals in Uganda during the post-independence era up to 1986. He points out that post-colonial Uganda inherited divergent ethnic groups whose pre-colonial setting was undermined by British colonialism which created "favoured" societies against the others. The British system of indirect rule, he asserts, "widened the gap in development so much so that at the attainment of independence, each ethnic group wanted to entrench itself in power in order to 'eat'. The leaders who came to power tended to promote and focus much attention on members of their ethnic background first before others were thought of later".⁴⁸ He then concludes that it was this sense of ethnic insiders and outsiders, more than any other factor, that brought about conflicts and, hence, the fall of those respective leaders from power. Whereas Okalany's contention that post-colonial leaders inherited divergent ethnic groups is convincing, he fails to examine why other African countries such as Kenya and Tanzania also inherited similar colonial systems, but have been marked by much less conflict than Uganda.

⁴⁸ D.H. Okalany, "Ethnicity and the Culture of Eating in Uganda, 1962-1986", 183.

What has become a recognizable feature in post-colonial politics in Uganda is the manipulation of ethnicity by the elite to satisfy selfish goals. Uganda's political elite simply manipulate formal political formulae and their socio-political bases to the extent that their particularistic interests are served. Consequently, this thesis argues that Uganda's instability is a function of a negative polarized imbalance of socio-political forces in which groups dictate political terms only acceptable to themselves. This state of political affairs, in turn, generates reaction from temporarily marginalized ethnic groups who seek, using political resources available to them, to overthrow the established political order. This then leads to frequent conflicts.

Nelson Kasfir and Ali Mazrui also explain Uganda's upheavals since independence by reference to ethnic tensions. Kasfir's work documents how ethnicity was embedded in Uganda's body politic.⁴⁹ He traces this development very well from the time of independence in 1962 but gives little room to the colonial period and how this early period laid grounds for later historical developments in Uganda. While one may argue that his concern was largely politics because of his academic orientation, a historical context is indispensable for understanding Uganda's political issues. Ali Mazrui⁵⁰ deals extensively with the involvement of the military in Uganda's politics. His work illustrates how this process started and developed in the post-colonial period. Whereas Mazrui singles out the military as the most destructive institution that Uganda has had since 1962, it is the ethnicisation of politics (and the military)

⁴⁹ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena: Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics; With a Case Study of Uganda*, (Berkeley: University of California Press 1976).

⁵⁰ A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: The Making of a Military Ethnocracy in Uganda*, 6.

by political leaders to promote their ethnic interests that has been the problem and not the military as an institution.

Other works on ethnic politics, such as those by Kenneth Ingham, Anthony Low, Ingham Kenneth, David Apter, Samwiri Karugire and Jorgensen,⁵¹ have mainly been concerned with Buganda, seeking to define its political status in colonial and post-colonial Uganda.

(b) Post-colonial Political Experiments in state building, the politicization of the military and conflicts in Uganda

Other useful works on conflicts in Uganda are those by Dan Mudoola. In his chapter on “Communal conflict in the military and its political consequences”, Mudoola argues that in various social formations, it is common that in the search for hegemony over fragile state institutions, leaders will resort to military means in trying to resolve what are, typically, political problems”.⁵² He singles out the nature of post-colonial politics and especially the excessive use of the army in trying to solve political issues as the central factor leading to conflicts in Uganda. “Frequently”, he writes, “in terms of political mobilization, recruitment of the army is based on ethnic criteria”.⁵³ Mudoola’s major argument is that the interventionist role of the army in Uganda has been the result of the failure of successive post-colonial leaders and politics in general to work out widely accepted institutionalized peaceful means of resolving

⁵¹ D. Apter, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). I. Kenneth, *The Making of Modern Uganda*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958) S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, J.J. Jorgensen, *Uganda: A Modern History*, (London: Croom Helm, 1981) and D.A Low, *Buganda in Modern History*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971).

⁵² D. Mudoola, “Communal Conflict in the Military and its Political Consequences” (1989), 13.

⁵³ D. Mudoola, “Communal Conflicts in the Military and its Political Consequences”, 13

differences. He traces the evolution of the military into politics since independence to when the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) government undermined the Constitution and brought the military into politics, thus weakening all other contending sources of power. This work informs our debate on the role of politics in national peace and security.

This study will illustrate how armies created along ethnic lines were used to support individual leaders in their pursuit of political goals, leading to gross violation of human rights and escalation of conflicts. In this way ethnicity was both politicized and militarized. The behaviour of such armies was eventually used to stereotype the entire society or ethnic group of the majority members constituting it. We also argue that in the political arena, this over-reliance on the army also encouraged a preference for military solutions even for political problems. We intend to show that these features are predominant in post-colonial politics and conflicts in Uganda and Acholiland in particular.

In his other work entitled *Religion, Ethnicity and Politics in Uganda*, Dan Mudoola accounts for political and institutional instability in post-colonial Uganda by focusing on the dynamic relationship between specific interest groups: the religious-cultural, trade union, students/youth and ethnic groups.⁵⁴ He illustrates how post-independence Uganda has been virtually an institutionless arena in which highly polarized interest groups have sought to capture power on their own terms, causing counter-reactions and conflicts which have compounded the process of institution-building. Although the

⁵⁴ D. Mudoola, *Religion, Ethnicity and Politics in Uganda*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1993), 2-3.

specific interest groups he focuses on, except ethnic groups, are not of direct relevance to our study, his analysis of Uganda's post-colonial institutionless politics and analytical appraisal of and comparison with Tanzania's relative stability because of reliance on political institutions is vital to this study. By showing how various groups were in mutual competition, preventing the growth of any cohesive unifying national aspiration, Mudoola contributes to an understanding of colonial and post-colonial Uganda politics significantly.

Another stimulating work is by Amii Omara-Otunnu. Employing a historical analysis, Omara-Otunnu attributes the high incidence of socio-political conflicts in Uganda to the lack of structural integration of the different parts of the country into one state, and the consequent perception of divergent interests by the various constituent parts. He then correctly contends that "the occurrence of conflict in Uganda has borne a direct relationship to the existence or absence of a variable national ideology or ethos and the degree of internal legitimacy of the authorities".⁵⁵

His analysis of the political situation in post-colonial Uganda will enrich this study in different ways. In Ugandan politics, as this study will show, conflicts have been a consequence of disturbances of socio-political equilibrium and shifts in the locus of power, together with concomitant economic benefits. Ethnic considerations then come in because every incoming ruling group will attempt to restructure power relations differently from that which had hitherto

⁵⁵ A. Omara-Otunnu, "The Dynamics of Conflict in Uganda", in Oliver Furley (Ed.), *Conflict in Africa*, (London: I. B Touris Publishers 1993), 225.

obtained. The end result is the division into the “haves and have nots”, thus, creating a volatile state for conflicts.

Edward Khiddu-Makubuya and Abraham Kiapi address the role of “Paramilitarism” and “the Constitution”, respectively, as the main factors leading to conflicts in Uganda. Khiddu-Makubuya argues that Uganda’s paramilitary agencies such as the National Security Agency (NASA), General Security Agency (GSA), and State Research Bureau (SRB) have not only been principal instrumentalities of the violation of human rights in Uganda but have also served to entrench ethnic politics and regimes in power. They have thus “undermined the development of national democratic institutions and the emergency of fair play in Ugandan public life, opening way for armed conflict as a means of political ends”.⁵⁶

Although Khiddu-Makubuya’s study takes on an issue rarely discussed and theorized in the literature of internal conflicts, it adds knowledge on the central aspect, namely, politics and conflicts in Uganda, which is the basic subject of this study. The ethnic factor that he identifies as the yardstick for recruitment to such organizations helps to illustrate how politicized ethnicity in Uganda is a crucial factor in the day-to-day political dispensation in the country.

Abraham Kiapi, on his part, discusses the various approaches to conflict resolution in multi-ethnic societies, particularly the critical role the constitution

⁵⁶ E. Khiddu-Makubuya, “Paramilitarism and Human rights”, in K Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, 15.

plays in mediation between claims made upon the state.⁵⁷ Although most of his efforts are on the mediation process and legalities of the constitution, he acknowledges an essential fact that political manipulation of constitutions in Uganda to favour one ethnic group or leader at the expense of the others and the trend towards one party rule eliminates other players and results in conflict. For our study, his work will assist in some areas of post-colonial politics and its management or mismanagement that that result in conflicts.

Akiiki Bomera Mujaju adds new dimensions on the conflicts in Uganda.⁵⁸ He argues that internal conflicts are a product of the country's own history and, in most African countries, the result of the colonial heritage. Mujaju also discusses the international and regional context which fuels and helps to escalate internal conflicts. These external factors then exploit the internal fragility of the political system characteristics of Uganda. His work will help our study on the role of politics and external assistance in the escalation of conflict in Acholiland. As he states, "because our political systems are initially incoherent and because aspects of their internal form are projections of the external environment, they are easily manipulated from outside".⁵⁹ Like earlier scholars, Mujaju also contends that political power in Uganda is strongly concentrated at the centre, with no strong structures mediating between the centre and the periphery, leading to possibilities of conflict. He also points to the acquisition of lethal

⁵⁷ A. Kiapi, "The Constitution as a Mediator in Internal Conflict", in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, 33-44.

⁵⁸ A.B Mujaju, "Internal Conflict and its International Context", in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (Oslo, London: James Currey, 1989). See also R. Mukama, "The Linguistic Dimension of Ethnic Conflict", in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (Oslo, London: James Currey, 1989) and A. Nsibambi, "The Land Question and Conflict", in K. Rupensinghe (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, (Oslo, London: James Currey, 1989).

⁵⁹ A. Mujaju, "Internal Conflicts and its International Context", 19.

arms by conflicting groups and how this escalates conflicts. Whereas he has varied examples from contemporary Mozambique, Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Sudan, Angola and Zaire to illustrate his point, our study shall especially focus on the role of Sudan and the Karamoja-Kenya corridor of cattle rustlers as relevant examples.

Behrend Heike⁶⁰ and Frank Van Acker⁶¹ provide a military explanation of the conflicts in Uganda. Behrend's summary of the post-colonial condition of violence and counter-violence that characterized Uganda also supports the above view. In her words,

With the militarization of politics that had already begun under Obote in the 1960s, the state has increasingly itself become an instrument of violent retaliation. Whoever took over state power was not only able to gain wealth, but also to revenge against members of other ethnic groups or religions as in times before the existence of the state.⁶²

This indictment applied to all the regimes since Uganda's political independence, including the current National Resistance Movement government.

Frank Van Acker, in his chapter on "Uganda and the Lords Resistance Army: The New Order No One Ordered", deals specifically with the post-1986 conflicts in Acholiland by focusing on the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) of Joseph Kony. The basic argument that he advances is that conflicts in Uganda are because

⁶⁰ H. Behrend, "Is Alice Lakwena a Witch? The Holy Spirit Movement and its Fight against Evil in the North of Uganda", in H. Hansen & M. Twaddle (Eds.), *Changing Uganda: The Dilemma of Structural Adjustment*, (London: James Currey, 1999).

⁶¹ F. Van Acker, "Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army: The New Order no One Ordered", in *African Affairs*, 103 (2004), 335-349.

⁶² H Behrend, "Is Alice Lakwena a Witch?" 23.

Uganda's post-colonial experiments in state-building were largely based on the army as an instrument of domestic politics. Domestic politics itself then increasingly became a function of ethnic retaliation which, in-turn, not only hardened ethnic boundaries but created a sizeable and almost unemployable "lumpen militariat" class which solidified violence as a means of interaction in society.⁶³

Although both Behrend Heike and Van Acker do not describe the entire history of the Acholi conflict in detail, they still bring out the salient realities of Ugandan politics where violence has become a solution of first rather than last resort and in which every war can be justified since it is always embedded in the history of the country. Even when they only focus on the Holy Spirit Movement of Alice Lakwena and the Lord's Resistance Army or respectively, their work will be very useful to our study partly because they ably illustrate the kind of politics in post-colonial Uganda where the state became the instrument of violent retaliation in the arena of domestic politics and show how this has made the military either a public good or a public bane.

(c) Conflict as a result of the complex Religious practices, traditions and culture of the Acholi

Some scholars, such as Mujaju, attribute the persistent post-colonial instability and conflicts in Uganda in general to religious differences germinated during the colonial period.⁶⁴ They contend that "Religious groups and their activities have

⁶³ F. Van Acker, "Uganda and the Lords Resistance Army", 338-339.

⁶⁴ A.B. Mujaju, "The Political Crisis of Church Institutions in Uganda", in *African Affairs*, 75, 298 (Jan. 1975). See also F. Welbourn, *Religion and Politics in Uganda*, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1965), 37-38 and D.A Low, *Religion and Society in Buganda; 1875-1900*, (Kampala: East African Institute of Social Research, 1962).

proved durable and divisive in Uganda since the introduction of Protestantism, Catholicism and Islam before and during the colonial period”. Mujaju takes it further by illustrating how African political parties in Uganda in the decade before independence took on something of a religious character in terms of their constituencies and this remained the case afterwards. He believes that differences between or among these religious groups laid foundation for later conflicts in Uganda. This expose falls out of the present study’s basic objective though the literature they detail remains historically correct.

In the same vein, D. Nkurunziza ⁶⁵ and Thomas Ofcansky ⁶⁶ emphasize that the origin of the on-going conflict in Acholiland in northern Uganda can, to a certain extent, be traced to the complex religious traditions of the Acholi tribe and is deeply rooted in ethnic mistrust between the Acholi people and the ethnic groups of central and southern Uganda.

Okumu ⁶⁷ argues further that besides religion, the primary cause of the current stage of the conflict (1986-2006) is the mistrust, especially of Museveni, when he first failed to keep the terms of the Nairobi Peace Agreement of 1985 between his National Resistance guerilla Army and the Uganda government then under the leadership of Tito-Okello Lutwa (an Acholi), the mistreatment of former Acholi soldiers and other grievances among certain groups of Acholi, which,

⁶⁵ D. Nkurunziza & L. Mugumya (Eds.), *Towards a Culture of Peace and Non-violent Action in Uganda*, (Kampala: Makerere University kampala,2000),2

⁶⁶ T. P. Ofcansky, “Warfare and Instability along the Sudan-Uganda Border: A look at the 20th Century”, in J. Spaulding and Stephanie Beswick (Eds.), *White Nile, Black blood: War, Leadership and Ethnicity from Khartoum to Kampala*, (Asmara: The Red Sea Press, Inc 2000), 197-208.

⁶⁷ R.R. Okumu, “The Effects of War on Government Policies in Northern Uganda from 1986”, (Gulu, UNDP Unpublished).

however, he does not name. The Nairobi peace agreement was an attempt by President Moi to mediate between Yoweri Museveni and Tito Okello who had overthrown Obote in 1985. This attempt failed after the NRA accused Tito Okello of violating the terms that had been agreed on. According to Okumu, this explains the twenty year old conflict. While the efforts by these scholars are commendable, their explanations neglect historical factors. As will be highlighted in the present study, the aspects these scholars emphasize play a role in the conflict but are not necessarily its roots or even central cause. These scholars' rather reductionist image of the war and its causes, still common in the understanding of conflicts in Africa, must be taken with care.

In other instances, explanations which border on ethnic stereotyping have been advanced with regard to war in Acholiland. According to President Museveni, who among other things is the Chief spokesman for the National Resistance Movement (NRM), the initial reason for the conflict in Northern Uganda was that the Acholi and Langi communities were deprived of their ability to get rich through looting from other Ugandans. Museveni further states that "it was tribal opportunism that brought such numbers (50,000) of people to their side. In other words, the reasons why the rebels in the north, organized on a tribal basis, were fighting to control the national government was because the NRM stopped them from looting."⁶⁸ This kind of explanation lends credence to this study's main argument that conflict in Acholiland is partly a result of bad politics, and ethnic stereotyping. Such a statement from the President and Commander-in-Chief of Uganda's armed forces exposes the extent to which the

⁶⁸ Y. K. Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle for Freedom and Democracy in Uganda*, 59.

Acholi, in general, have been seen in the image of the few Acholi soldiers in the Uganda army. This ethnic stereotype of the Acholi has contributed greatly to the rise of rebel movements in the area.

In addition, it has also been argued that the war in northern Uganda in general and Acholiland in particular is criminal, not political and that the insurgents are bandits and not rebels. Major General James Kazini, a non-Acholi and member of Uganda's Army High Command, and Army General between 1998 and 2004, blames all violence upon the Acholi, saying: "If anything, it is local Acholi soldiers causing these problems. It is the cultural background of the people here. They are naturally violent. It is genetic".⁶⁹ This view from a senior military officer executing the war demonstrates the stereotypes and propaganda that have intensified as the conflict persists. This explanation also fails if rated against tested social-cultural anthropological studies. Most studies in this area argue that violence, war and conflicts are socially and politically patterned rather than that they are the mere expressions of something biologically innate.⁷⁰ This study maintains that the conflict in Acholiland must be understood in the context of national Ugandan politics.

PREVAILING SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT AND THEIR APPROACHES

The decision to take up arms is a complex process involving many actors in a wide range of conditions and circumstances. Thus, it is almost impossible to reduce conflict to a single cause or source, whether local, national, regional or

⁶⁹ *Human Rights Watch*, (New York: Lius Institute, 1997), 59.

⁷⁰ T. Allen, (Ed.), *Divided Europeans: Understanding Ethnicities in Conflict*, (Hagire Boston: Klunwer Law International 1999). See also T. Allen and J. Seaton (Eds.), *The Media Conflicts: War Reporting and Representation of Ethnic Violence*, (London: Zed Books, 1999)

international. The history of a war's outbreak is usually complex and multifaceted and the historian must take carefully nuanced choices as to which factors to stress or what evidence to trust. The task is complicated because as Welch⁷¹ points out, there are very few necessary conditions for war and very many sufficient conditions of which only a few of these may apply in any single conflict.

Since 1945, civil or internal conflicts have been more common in Africa than international or inter-state conflicts.⁷² Different schools have advanced different theories in explanation of conflicts in different parts of the world. Six general explanations are often advanced to account for the rise of an armed opposition. These explanations include; the Relative deprivation theory, Group Entitlement theory, State Responses and Capabilities theory or theory of diffusion, the Economic Development theory and Theory of Protracted Social Conflict (PSC).

The Relative Deprivation Theory⁷³ offers an explanation that is based on the contrast between the Group's expected and actual access to prosperity and power. This theory places great emphasis on what the rebel groups expect and actual access to prosperity and power. It also emphasises the role of what the rebel groups expect a state to give them and its capability. It, thus, places too much emphasis on psychological factors and on perceptions at the expense of the concrete social, economic and political realities that lead to armed conflicts. According to this theory, armed opposition in Uganda and Acholiland in

⁷¹ D. Welch, *Justice and the Genesis of War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 8.

⁷² D. Singer, "Armed Conflict in the Former Colonial Regions; From Classification to Explanation", in V.D. Goo and K. Rupensinghe (Eds.), *Between Development and Destruction: An Enquiry into the causes of Conflict in Post-Colonial States*, (The Hague: Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

⁷³ T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 447-8.

particular has been presented as an outcome of the neglect of the region by the National Resistance Government.⁷⁴

The above approach is closely related to Group Entitlement theory,⁷⁵ which places more explicit emphasis on ethnic factors which accompany the economic and political issues.⁷⁶ This theory projects that the more diverse a country is ethnically, the more the expectation of the different ethnic groups, and the more, the possibility of conflicts if such expectations are not fulfilled. This theory would suggest that because of the ethnic diversity of Uganda, conflicts that have bedeviled it since independence are because of failed expectations and would narrow the causes of conflict in Acholiland to a single factor. It places emphasis on ethnic diversity as a source of conflict.

It is also important to emphasize that ethnic diversity does not in itself seem to be a cause of war, for if it were, the most war-prone states would be the most ethnically diverse, which is not the case. Indeed, it may well be that ethnic and religious factionalization even reduces the risk of violent conflict,⁷⁷ perhaps because it encourages divergent groups to learn the skills of living together, despite diversity. It is only when this learning process fails that ethnic diversity may turn out to exacerbate conflict precisely because it offers fertile material for political mobilisation. Here then ethnicity will have been politicized. The case of the disintegration of Yugoslavia during the 1990s is a good example.

⁷⁴ A. G. G. Ginyera Pinywa *Northern Uganda in National Politics*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1992), 16.

⁷⁵ D. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985)

⁷⁶ T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 236.

⁷⁷ P. Collier, "Doing Well Out of War". Paper presented in Conference on Economic Agendas in Civil War London, April 26-27, 1999. 6-12.

According to the State Responses and Capabilities theory, there is a U-shaped relationship between repression by the state and the upsurge of armed opposition or any other form of domestic violence.⁷⁸ When repression is high; signifying some form of state strength and the absence of a collapsed state, the costs of rebelling are high. This demotivates the would-be rebels. On the other hand, low levels of oppression signify the presence of alternative institutions through which disadvantaged groups can express their views. This makes violent expression of political and other social interests unnecessary.⁷⁹

The problem with this theory is that it places a great deal of emphasis on the nature of the state and much less on the nature of armed opposition itself. Worse still, the assumption that situations of high repression increase the cost of rebellion ignores the role of external factors. In the case of Uganda, the more the Government increased military expenditure and use of force through the famous “iron fist” policy, the more the rebellion intensified and even spread to the neighbouring districts of Teso and Lango in the 1990s. The armed groups also reduced the cost of armed rebellion by operating from neighbouring Southern Sudan. The Acholi as a people occupy a wide stretch of land across the border and into Southern Sudan. The rebels therefore found friendly sanctuary in Southern Sudan from where they increased their recruitment and attacks into Uganda.

⁷⁸ T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 237.

⁷⁹ Boswell and Dixon, “Dependency and Rebellion: A Cross National Analysis”, *American Sociological Review*, (1990), 55. See also E. Muller and E. Weede, “Cross-National Variation in Political Violence: A Rational Action Approach”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 34 (1990), 40-78.

The Galton problem or Theory of Diffusion is based on the assumption that armed conflict/opposition in one particular context has a lot to do with the existence of other rebellions across space.⁸⁰ Armed opposition is assumed to emerge in areas with recent histories of domestic strife. In such a context, armed opposition emerges because; first it is institutionalized as a mechanism for changing power or support for the rebellion of a kindred group⁸¹ or because rebellion in one area constitutes an opportunity for rebellion elsewhere since the state is considered weak and spread to contain politically inspired violence. In other cases, armed rebellion by one group may serve as an example to other groups to emerge. In Uganda, it can be argued that the National Resistance Army victory in 1986 was an example for several other groups within Uganda and across its borders to emulate. However, conflict in Acholiland goes beyond 1986 making it impossible to base all emphasis on the above explanation. Acholiland has experienced years of conflict both in the colonial and post-colonial periods before the rise to power of Museveni.

Economic conditions emerge as the most important explanatory factors. The key issue in this explanation is a low level of economic development in Acholiland and Uganda in general.⁸² This may be indicated by the low average Gross National Product per capita, by a disproportionately large agricultural sector, or by a country's economic vulnerability to shifts in world markets in commodities and capital. Hauge and Ellingson identify lack of democratic openings as an important secondary factor in addition to poor economic

⁸⁰ M. Ross and Homer, "The Galton Problem in Cross-National Research", *World Politics* (1976), 29.

⁸¹ T. Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, 381.

⁸² W. Hauge and T. Ellingson, "Beyond Environmental Scarcity: Casual Pathways to Conflict", *Journal of Peace Research*, 35, 3 (1998), 299-317.

conditions. These findings are qualified by arguments and evidence put forward by Collier⁸³ that, even in poor societies, leaders are usually competing with one another for control of the available economic surplus, small as it may be. When the surplus is small, as in poor societies, competition for it may be particularly intense and a violent confrontation will very likely result. Whereas this may explain the terrible violence in Liberia (1989-1997), the war in Sierra Leone since 1991, decades of warfare in Angola, and the cycles of massacre and brutality in Burundi and Rwanda, it can be argued that no single theory can adequately explain the phenomenon of armed opposition the world over. Each armed rebellion occurs in a specific historical context. Each armed group, therefore, needs to be understood contextually and historically.

In the case of Uganda, we shall focus our attention on a conflict analysis referred to as the Protracted Social Conflict Theory [PSC]. This approach will enable us understand the contemporary conflict in Uganda and Africa from a broader perspective, thus jettisoning the common trend of defining Africa's conflicts as exclusively ethnic or exclusively external.⁸⁴ PSC refers to the "prolonged and often violent struggle by communal groups for such basic needs as security, recognition and acceptance, fair access to political institutions and economic participation".⁸⁵ It is through the PSC that we can understand that

⁸³P. Collier, "Doing Well Out of War, 6–12" See also Collier P. & A. Hoeffler. *Justice Seeking and Loot Seeking in Civil War*, (Washington D.C: The World Bank/CSAE, 1999), 5.

⁸⁴ H. Solomon and de Coning "Enhancing the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution", in *Poletaria*, 19 (1999), 34-35.

⁸⁵ H. Miall, et al., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts*, (London: Polity Press 2000), 71.

complex processes rather than a singular factor often lead to conflicts in Africa.⁸⁶

CONFLICT AND ETHNICITY

In the contemporary debate on ethnicity and its place in politics, consensus has emerged on two key features. One concerns the formation of ethnic identities like the Acholi, as a social construct defined by historical conditions in which they emerge.⁸⁷ The other concern, which impacts on this study, is the function ethnicity performs in contemporary society. J. Hutchinson and A. Smith, in *Ethnicity*⁸⁸ present the theory of instrumentalism of ethnicity which will guide our study of conflicts in post-colonial Acholiland. According to them, ethnicity is mainly a political weapon which people find convenient to mobilize for selfish goals. There is evidence in Africa to suggest that where ethnicity has been central in conflicts, there have always been political machinations behind it.

In post-colonial Uganda, political manipulation based on ethnic differences has become the main means used by the political elite to legitimate themselves in power, with particular ethnic groups considered important in the wielding of political and military power. This fits the instrumentalism theory of ethnicity advanced by J. Hutchinson and Smith. The Acholi, have paid the price of this manipulation in colonial and post-colonial Uganda through conflicts that have bedeviled the area.

⁸⁶ H. Solomon and de Coning, "Enhancing the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution", 35.

⁸⁷ J. Markakis, "Nationalism and Ethnicity: A Theoretical Perspective". A Paper Presented at a Workshop on Ethnicity and the State in East Africa, Ossrea: Addis Ababa, June 1996, 3-5.

⁸⁸ J. Hutchinson and A. Smith, *Ethnicity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 125.

In the colonial period, the British manipulated the Acholi as labourers for plantations in the South and later as soldiers in the army. The British preferred the Acholi to man the army based on the myth they created of the Acholi people as being a 'martial tribe'. Whereas we do appreciate the contribution of the colonial period and especially the effects of British policy of divide and rule, it is still prudent to question the role of post-colonial leadership and how they handled this legacy of British colonial rule in Uganda, especially on the Acholi. This myth was extended into the post-independence period of Obote (1962-1971) and (1980-1985). Whereas this myth was without any scientific basis, it has contributed to the conflict Acholiland has experienced since 1962. During Obote's first regime (1962-1971), the Acholi were dominant in the army as well as in political offices. After the destruction of the Buganda kingdom (1966), new threats emerged and Obote heavily relied on the Acholi and Langi for support in the army to stay in power. Even then, however, the Acholi largely remained dominant in lower ranks, unlike the Langi who formed the officer corps of Obote's army.⁸⁹ In 1971, this dominance was interrupted by Amin after overthrowing Obote.

Immediately after Idi Amin's coup in 1971, as Hansen writes, "Obote the individual became identified with the whole of Lango group and his regime, with the Acholi as well".⁹⁰ The Acholi's special access to the military and politics turned into a deadly liability. During the early years of his violent rule, Idi Amin

⁸⁹ A. G. G. Ginyera-Pincywa, *Northern Uganda in National Politics*, 16.

⁹⁰ H. Hansen, "Ethnicity and Military Rule in Uganda", *Research Report 43* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute, 1977).

extended conflict into Acholiland by ordering mass killings of Acholi army personnel, civilians, as well as politicians and Acholi intellectuals, including Anglican Archbishop Janani Luwum. It is widely acknowledged that thousands of Acholi individuals died and that many more fled the country.⁹¹

In this way, ethnic manipulation of the Acholi by Obote is what Idi Amin (1971-1979) used to justify his brutal policy and extension of conflict into Acholiland. Amin and his associates also targeted Lango individuals, yet, as Mazrui, correctly notes, “had the vengeance of the coup been directed at the government of Obote as a whole, it would have had to be directed at people from almost every corner of Uganda.⁹² The ministers were drawn from West Nile, Lango, Acholi, Kigezi, Ankole, Buganda, Bunyoro, Teso and elsewhere. During Obote’s second term in power (1980-1985), soldiers in the new army (Uganda National Liberation Army), including Acholi individuals, took revenge on people living in the West Nile region where Amin came from.⁹³ Besides, Obote also manipulated the Acholi in fighting Museveni’s guerillas in Luwero, during his second term. The result of this manipulation was double fold. First, the Acholi became the most hated “tribe” in Uganda, especially in the south, where the elite claimed that the Acholi dominated in the political arena and in the army.

⁹¹ A. G. G. Ginyera-Pincywa, *Northern Uganda in National Politics*, 16. See also H. Hansen, *Ethnicity and Military Rule in Uganda: A Study of Ethnicity as a Political Factor Based on a Discussion of Political Anthropology and the Application of its Result*, Research Report, No 43 (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies 1977).

⁹² A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*, 117.

⁹³ J. Crisp, “Ugandan Refugees in Sudan and Zaire: The Problem of Repatriation”, *African Affairs*, 85 (1986), 339 and P. G. Okoth, “Uganda-Sudan Relations: The Fallacy of Inter-state Conflict Management via Bilateral Diplomacy, 1955-1995”, in P. G. Okoth and B. A. Ogot, (Eds.), *Conflicts in Contemporary Africa*, (Nairobi: Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, 2000), 94 -116.

The NRM leadership under Museveni also fell prey to this myth in whipping up support during its struggle against Obote and even after taking over power in 1986. In an interview with the *Drum Magazine*, in Nairobi, in 1985, Museveni categorically stated:

the problem in Uganda is that the leadership has mainly been from the north. The Acholi are everywhere: in the army, big offices, etc. The southerners, who are mainly Bantu, have played a peripheral role all these years since independence in 1962.⁹⁴

The second effect of Obote's manipulation of the Acholi, was the extension of conflict into Acholiland after the fall of Tito Okello, (an Acholi), who had overthrown Obote in 1985. Since 1986, Acholiland has remained a battlefield between different rebel groups and the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces of Yoweri Museveni's government.

When Museveni captured the capital city Kampala in 1986, soldiers from the previous governments left Kampala and fled northwards. From their bases in Southern Sudan, some of them regrouped and launched the Uganda People's Democratic Movement/Army (UPDM/A).⁹⁵ Museveni's troops which followed the fleeing Obote and Okello soldiers allegedly killed, raped and used other forms of physical abuse aimed at non-combatants as well when they reached Acholiland, which was foreign territory to them.⁹⁶ People in the war-torn Acholiland also saw the army's looting of their cattle as a deliberate strategy to destroy them.

⁹⁴ *Drum (East) Magazine*, (October 1985), 9.

⁹⁵ C. Lamwaka, "Civil War and the Peace Process in Uganda, 1986-1997" in *East African Journal of Peace and Human Rights*, 4(2) (1998), 139-169. See also B. Nyeko and L Okello, "Profiles of the Parties in the Conflict", in Okello Lucima (Ed.), *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to End the Violence in Northern Uganda* (London: Conciliation Resources and Kacoke Madit, 2002), 1-6.

⁹⁶ R. Doom and K. Vlassenroot, "Kony's Message: A New Koine? The Lords Resistance Army in Northern Uganda", *African Affairs*, 98 (390) (1999), 5-36.

Moreover, the war was also a kind of ethnic cleansing on the Acholi for their “political domination” of politics in Uganda and revenge for the Luwero massacre which was still blamed on them. As one time Prime Minister Kintu-Musoke once put it, “the Acholi have to pay for what they did in Luwero”.⁹⁷ This justifies J. Hutchinson and A. Smith’s position that ethnicity is a political weapon which people find convenient to mobilize.⁹⁸

The destruction that followed Museveni’s takeover in 1986 has affected all sectors of Acholi society to a degree never experienced before,⁹⁹ and, eventually, even elders and other influential members of Acholi society were to be instrumental in the increased recruitment of young people to rebel ranks. One can argue that the Acholi did this, partly, for self defence.

The dynamics of conflicts in Acholiland since 1986 have been characterized by different rebel groups. First, was the Uganda People’s Democratic Movement, initiated by sympathizers of the former President, Tito Okello. Then came the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) of Alice Lakwena. After the defeat of Lakwena, her father, Severino Lukoya, continued with the resistance for a few months until 1987 when he was captured. The stage was then set for the rise and continued resistance of Joseph Kony and his, so-called, the Lords Resistance Army. It is this movement that the NRM government is still battling with to-date.

⁹⁷ *The Monitor*, 129 (1996).

⁹⁸ Amnesty International *Uganda: The Failure to Safeguard Human Rights*, (London: Amnesty International, 1992).

⁹⁹ Amnesty International *Uganda: The Failure to Safeguard Human Rights*.

In this historical study of conflict in post-colonial Acholiland, we contend that politicization of ethnicity is orchestrated for the purpose of obtaining access to state power in order to gain access to resources commanded by the state. Because the pattern of resource distribution in both the colonial and post-colonial state is inequitable, ethnicity has proved to be the most effective weapon to use. This fits well in the theory of Instrumentalism of W. Weber, J. Eller, R. Coghlan, W. Conner, A. Cohen and F. Barth, put together in *Ethnicity* by J. Hutchinson and A. Smith.¹⁰⁰

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem which, among others, seems pervasive on the global scene today and is undermining social stability seems to be both intra-state and inter-state conflict. Post-colonial Uganda is no exception, as it has become a veritable theatre of intra-state conflicts. Conflicts in Uganda have increased in the recent past, each aiming at different results. Acholiland in northern Uganda remains the theatre of such prolonged conflict since independence in 1962.

In the last 20 years alone (1986-2006), different rebel groups have sprung up in armed opposition to the National Resistance Movement government under Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. Since 1986, anti-government armed groups include the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), the Uganda Peoples Army (UPA) in Teso region, Force Obote Back Again (FOBA), Ninth October Movement (NOM) in Lango, National Liberation of Uganda (NALU), Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in Kasese-Western Uganda, West Nile Bank Front (WNBF) and Uganda Rescue

¹⁰⁰ J. Hutchinson & A. Smith, *Ethnicity*, 30.

Front in West Nile region of Northern Uganda. To-date, all these areas have been pacified, with the exception of Acholiland. Despite the blustering rhetoric of the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF), Uganda's National Army and "Operation Iron Fist" which they launched in the 1990s, the army has still failed to damage the rebels in Acholiland significantly. Instead, this operation brought the rebels from their camps in Southern Sudan to permanent residence on the doorsteps of the Acholi people and the neighbouring areas.

The dominant explanation that has been given at the official level for the persistent conflict in this area is that such conflicts are a colonial legacy and that ethnicity is deeply entrenched in them. At the unofficial level, conflict in this area is perceived as the outcome of the cultural and militant background of the Acholi people, their assumed violent nature genetically, and their complex traditions and religions. There is need to critically analyse the official as well as the unofficial perspectives to explain the on-going conflict in the area better. The nature of post-colonial politics and especially how political leaders or the elite have handled the ethnic question and resource allocation need to be equally examined. The attempt by the state to resolve the conflict using a military approach has been a dismal failure partly because the root causes of the conflict and the interests of the parties in it have not been properly analysed as an initial framework for the peace process.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to reconstruct the historicity of the conflict in post-colonial Acholiland with a view to establishing its main cause and how the conflict could be mitigated. More specifically, this study will seek to:

- Analyse and document the historical development of conflict in Acholiland,
- Locate the possible local and International factors that have exacerbated it, and
- Propose ways of resolving or minimizing the extent of the conflict.

METHODOLOGY

This study relied heavily on secondary sources, newspapers, interviews, participant observation and group discussion, as well as various government documents, such as parliamentary debates, reports from parliamentary committees on Defence and war in Northern Uganda and in Western Uganda and West Nile, reports from peace meetings, briefs with the rebel leaders and by Sudanese delegations to Uganda. Also useful were minutes of the Kacoke Madit (Grand Acholi meetings held in London and Botswana), reports from committees on resettlement of Internally Displaced People and Disaster Preparedness reports as well as reports from Northern Uganda Social Fund Project. Other sources of information were Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations working in Acholiland or dealing with conflict and peace related activities and International Organisations like World Vision, Accord Uganda, International Alert, Amnesty International, and *Medicines Sans Frontiers*.

Chapter Outline

The Study is organised as follows:

Chapter 1 lays down the key arguments informing the study, while Chapter 2 focuses on Acholiland prior to British colonialism. Chapter 3 examines how British colonialism was established in Acholiland and its impact on the socio-economic and political life of the people and institutions there. Chapters 4 and 5 analyse post-independence political leadership and conflict in Uganda between 1962 and 2006 and the politics, ethnicity and conflict in Acholiland, respectively. Chapter 6 focuses on the causes and dynamics of conflict in Acholiland from 1986 to 2006 and the final chapter, explores the consequences of conflict in Acholiland as well as providing the Conclusion to the study.

ACHOLILAND PRIOR TO BRITISH COLONISATION

This chapter examines aspects of the initial stages of the imperial condition and its impact in Acholiland, focusing on the encounter between the Acholi people and early imperial intruders into the region; like the Arabs, Nubians, Turko-Egyptians and later the British.

The Acholi people have been classified by anthropologists as “Nilotes”. This term was originally used indiscriminately by European explorers, traders, government officials and travellers to refer to all peoples of the Upper Nile Valley. Subsequently, only certain of those people with closely related physical, linguistic and other cultural characteristics were designated as Nilotes.¹⁰¹ These groups generally have traditions and myths which suggest a common origin. Other groups living in the Upper reaches of the Nile (variously called Bantu, Nilo-Hamitic, Sudanic tribes) have been greatly affected by the Nilotes through migration, warfare, assimilation and intermarriage. In turn, the Nilotes have also been influenced physically, linguistically and culturally by their neighbours.

The name (Acholi) by which the people are known today came into use only during the colonial period and its derivation is uncertain and contested. Earlier travelogues of Emin Pash and Samuel Baker incorrectly categorized them as

¹⁰¹ B. Audrey, *The Nilotes of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Uganda*, (London: International African Institute, 1952). See also J.P. Crazzolaro, “The Lwoo People”, *Uganda Journal*, V, 1 (1938) and B. A. Ogot, *History of Southern Luo*, I, *Migration and Settlement, 1500-1900* (Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House, 1967).

Shilluk and called them Shuli. The variants Shuuli and Shooli became broadly used at the time when Arab traders in slaves and ivory moved into the region in the 1850s.¹⁰² Parallel to this outside label, the Acholi were sometimes called “Gang” or “Gangi”, meaning home or village; a name given to the Acholi by their southern neighbours.¹⁰³ Acholi neighbours, the Lango and the Banyoro, initially called them “Gang” or “gangi”.¹⁰⁴ The denomination Acholi was of recent origin, although a people with a common culture and socio-political life was already in place when the Arab traders and European explorers arrived in the region. The Alur neighbours of the Acholi in the West of River Nile called them “Lango” but this, apparently, is a general word meaning ‘stranger’, which happens to have been adopted by the people known as the Lango to the South-East of the Acholi.

According to Girling, some of the Acholi speak of themselves as “Lwo”, but this name refers specifically to the supposed descendants of certain migratory groups. He then hazards a guess that it seems possible that the name “Acholi”, like the names of very many other people, is derived from the local word “an-loco-li, meaning “I am a man”. This name may have come, according to him, into use only recently (about 30 years ago), as the internal cohesion of the people increased and the need for a new word became felt.¹⁰⁵ This suggests that the development of this name was gradual as Acholi ethnic identity came into reality over time.

¹⁰² F. Sverker, 2003, *Living With Bad Surroundings: War and Existential Uncertainty in Acholiland, Northern Uganda*, (Sweden: Uppsala Studies in Cultural Anthropology, 2003), 54.

¹⁰³ Okot P’ Bitek, “The Concept of Jok among the Acholi” in *Uganda Journal* xxvii, (1963), 15-29.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Gang’, as used by Lango & Banyoro, meant village. “Gang” was also used by the first European travellers who approached the area from the South and it appeared in the first grammar of the language in 1907. It was used to differentiate those Acholi who were settled agriculturists in villages and those wandering hunters (or the Kidi).

¹⁰⁵ F. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 1-2.

Today the Acholi people generally consider themselves a distinct ethnic group and call their language Acholi or, sometimes, Luo. They live mainly in Pader, Kitgum, and Gulu district; four of the northern districts in Uganda, of which two, Gulu and Kitgum, border Sudan. According to the 2002 national census, the population of the three districts numbered 1,083,973. This makes up some four to five percent of Uganda's total population of more than twenty million.¹⁰⁶ The districts of Pader and Kitgum correspond roughly to Acholi Mamalo or the Upper Acholi, or, literally, those who descended from the hill. Gulu district corresponds to Acholi Mapiny or, according to the Acholi, the lower Acholi.

¹⁰⁶ Uganda Government, *Uganda Population and Housing Census*, (Kampala: Government of Uganda, 2002), 37.

districts of Gulu, Pader and Kitgum. These districts constitute some twelve percent of the country's total area or 27,872 square kilometres.¹⁰⁷ Situated on a plateau 3,000 to 4000 feet (1,025-1,350 meters) above sea level, the district consists of nearly 11,000 square miles (28,400 square kilometres) of rolling savannah.¹⁰⁸ Acholiland enjoys substantially natural borders. It lies to the northeast of Lake Albert, the most northerly of the well-defined basins of the Western Rift Valley. The Nile flows into and immediately out of the north end of the lake. It provides Acholiland with its Southern and Western borders.

The greater part of Acholiland -some eleven thousand square miles - lies within Uganda. The remainder lies over the border in the Sudan. The Acholi people also extend well into the Sudan but a range of mountains near the international boundary separates the Uganda Acholi from their kinsmen to the north. During the last fifty or so years, Acholi living in Uganda have tended to develop separately from those in the Sudan.¹⁰⁹ However, they are still one people and any change in the present situation might lead to a demand for them to be united under one political authority.

To the East, the semi-desert and the Labwor and Orum mountains lie between the Acholi and the neighbouring Karamojong. It is only in the southeast that Acholiland's boundary is not marked by a specific geographical feature. Acholiland also consists of a series of huge "terraces" rising gradually from west

¹⁰⁷ M. O. Rwabwoogo, *Uganda Districts Information Handbook*, (5th edition) (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2002), 7.

¹⁰⁸ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1994), 46.

¹⁰⁹ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 1.

to east. The Albert Nile, at about 2000 feet above sea-level, flows through the lowest and hottest land in Uganda where it forms the western boundary of Acholiland.¹¹⁰

The river Achwa or Aswa, as written in most English maps today, running from the south east towards the northwest, has naturalized the administrative border between the east and west.¹¹¹ In the colonial period, British colonial authorities categorised the lower Acholi as the western Acholi, with headquarters in Gulu town, while they labelled the Upper Acholi, the eastern Acholi, with the colonial administration based in Kitgum town. At that time, the districts were called Gulu and Chua. In 1937, the colonial administration merged the two to form a single Acholi District. Different regimes in Uganda have since divided or subdivided the large Acholi region. On 20th March 1971, General Idi Amin reversed the 1937 arrangement by separating the two once again.¹¹² Today, it is subdivided into Gulu, Amuru, Pader and Kitgum.

Acholiland is divided almost in half by the watershed of its two main river systems. The dividing line runs from the Lango District in the southeast to the Madi-Adjumani district in the northwest. Topography favours the land west of the watershed where rivers are perennial and the soil is relatively rich. Villages

¹¹⁰ J. Baker, "Baker and Ruyonga" in *Uganda Journal*, xxv, 2 (1961), 13-15.

¹¹¹ C. Leys, *Politicians and Policies: An essay on Politics in Acholiland, Uganda*, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967), 18. See also J. Webster, "The Peopling of Agago" in Onyango-Ku-Odongo and J. Webster (Eds.), *The Central Lwo during the Aconya* (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1976), 219-220.

¹¹² H.B. Thomas, and Scott, *Uganda*, (London, and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935), 113.

tend to be larger than those to the east where the smaller streams fill their rocky beds only during the rainy season.¹¹³

Rainfall in Acholiland is seasonally well-distributed, coming in two seasons, namely, in March to May and October to December. The rainfall is heaviest at the time of the vernal and autumnal equinoxes. Unfortunately, rainfall is not always reliable in Acholiland.

The distribution of annual rainfall between different areas of Acholiland also determines the rhythm of everyday life. Girling writes that:

During the rainy season, there is little intercommunication between the different areas of Acholiland. The people are...fully occupied with agricultural work, but the long grass and the swollen swamps and streams also make travelling difficult. This periodic isolation and the ties of cooperation in work which are established between members of the same local communities seemed to have increased the internal cohesion of the village and the domain or chiefdom.¹¹⁴

Although, over time, post-colonial regimes have tried to improve the communication infrastructure in this region, what Girling notes above still exists as one of the major problems. Before war arrived and intensified in Northern Uganda, especially after 1986, many Acholi families kept cattle. During the course of the war, however, most cattle have been looted or killed by the fighting forces. Only two percent (of approximately 250,000 heads) or some few thousand head of the cattle remain.¹¹⁵ While cattle have never been the

¹¹³ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 14-15.

¹¹⁴ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 14-15.

¹¹⁵ W. Weeks, "Pushing the Envelope: Moving beyond Protected Villages in Northern Uganda", (New York- Report submitted to the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian affairs), 2002, 35.

main source of income or subsistence for the great majority of Acholi,¹¹⁶ the symbolic significance of this cultural loss should not be underestimated. Many Acholi, especially older people, regard cattle as the most prestigious form of wealth.¹¹⁷ The Acholi also keep goats, sheep and pigs, which, for many, have become the major domestic animals since the outbreak of the war and the social unrest that accompanied it.

Agriculture remains the primary subsistence activity for most Acholi, with Millet and Sorghum being the staple crops. The Acholi also grow maize, sweet potatoes, cassava, peas, beans, groundnuts, simsim and various vegetables as well as other savannah crops. Tobacco, sugarcane, cotton, sunflower and rice are grown both for trade and consumption, but these activities too have been heavily affected by the war.

The Migration

Like their neighbours the Lango,¹¹⁸ the Acholi owe the emergence of their ethnic identity not to any kind of inner consistency, but to concrete historical experience, especially the experience of migration, which became the determining trait of their ethnic identity today.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Okot. P'Bitek, "The Concept of Jok Among the Acholi People", *Uganda Journal*, 27, 1 (1963), 15-29. Other related views in R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Acholi of Uganda*, 56.

¹¹⁷ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 61.

¹¹⁸ The Lango or Langi are neighbours of the Acholi and speak a Lwo language.

¹¹⁹ J. Tosh, *Clan Leaders and Colonial Chiefs in Lango*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

Starting around 1600, the people who would later be called the Acholi came with other Lwo in several waves of migration from the southern Sudan to their present territory and to Bunyoro.¹²⁰

The Acholi consider themselves a distinct tribal group from the other Lwo-speakers in northern Uganda. They came from the north as the Lwo, and after following a semi-circular route in the south of present-day Sudan, they crossed to the eastern bank of the Nile, somewhere in the region south of Nimule.¹²¹ They then followed the river upstream towards Lake Albert until they reached a place which they called Pubungu (modern Pakwach). At this place, some disagreement occurred among the migrating Lwo and they broke up. The break up of the migrating Lwo is of importance for the subsequent history of northern Uganda. The group that moved across the Nile at Chope into Bunyoro became the founders of the present Acholi group. Later in the eighteenth century, a number of Lwo migrated from Bunyoro back to Acholi and into what is now Kenya.¹²² According to Atkinson and others, it is this group that encountered and intermingled with the Madi; a Sudanic speaking group in the western part of the area. Once they settled, the Luo language superseded that of the Madi and the two groups joined together as the Acholi tribe.¹²³

Some Acholi clans claim to be descended from a common ancestor named Lwo, and designate themselves accordingly as Lwo¹²⁴. A number of these clans

¹²⁰ J. P. Crazzolaro, *The Lwo People*, 1-2.

¹²¹ J. P. Crazzolaro, *The Lwo People*, (Verona, Editrice Nigrizia 1950), 554.

¹²² R. M. Bere, "An outline of Acholi History", *Uganda Journal*, 11, 1 (1947), 1-8.

¹²³ F.K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 6.

¹²⁴ R. M. Bere, "An Outline of Acholi History", 1-8.

constituted about thirty chiefdoms in today's Acholi region, but these chiefdoms were extremely changeable, with constant splintering; a process perhaps corresponding to the internal African frontier model developed by Igor Kopytoff.¹²⁵

The Acholi in scholarly classification

In historical and ethnographic literature, the Acholi are commonly grouped together with the Chope, the Paluo and the Alur as the Central Lwo because of linguistic affinity and assumed common historical origin.¹²⁶ Most Acholi have no problem communicating linguistically with the Alur people who live west of the Acholi or the Lango (Langi) neighbours to the South. Roughly speaking, Acholiland and Langoland, the later consisting of Apac, Lira and Dokolo districts, correspond to the region often called northern Uganda.

Older ethnographic sources assign the Central Lwo to the broader category of the Nilotes.¹²⁷ The Nilotic denomination describes the various social groupings of the geographical region of the Upper Nile Basin; suggesting that there are cultural traits shared by these various peoples. In Evans Pritchard's terms, the Nilotic peoples constitute a "common ethnic stock" or "an ethno-regional cluster" of peoples.¹²⁸ The Upper Nile Basin is assumed to be the cradle-land of Nilotic peoples, from which migrations of the proto-Nilotes are said to have

¹²⁵ I. Kopytoff, *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

¹²⁶ F. Sverker, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, 59. See also J.O. Dwyer, "The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialisms", (PhD Dissertation, University of Colombia, 1972), 3.

¹²⁷ C. Selgiman and B.Z. Seligman, *Pegan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, (London: Routledge and Sons Ltd, 1932), and B. Audrey, *The Nilotes of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Uganda*, (London: International African Institute, 1952)

¹²⁸ E. Pritchard, "Nilotic Studies" in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 80, 1-2 (1950), 1-6.

originated. The term Nilotic is also known as a denomination of a language family in the study of African languages.¹²⁹

When discussing the Acholi, the Catholic Missionary Crazzolaro¹³⁰ and the political scientists Dwyer,¹³¹ argue that the Lwo (Luo, Lwoo) categorization is the only accurate one to use. Today, most Acholi people strongly identify themselves as Lwo and their native tongue as Luo. They use the Lwo denomination in the context of the wider history of migration in the region.¹³²

Some historians question the Lwo origin of the Acholi population and the historical accuracy of including the Acholi as a sub-group of Lwo.¹³³ More importantly, in everyday life, while these people may portray themselves as Acholi or even Lwo, they see themselves, first and foremost, as Ugandans. For these reasons and despite the objections of Atkinson, the Crazzolaro classifications of the Lwo will be used in this work. The Acholi are indeed Nilotes and are part of the migrants from the Bahr-el-Ghazel region of modern southern Sudan

The clan as the basis of socio-political organizations

The Acholi ideology of social organization is oriented to patrilineal descent with decentralized and exogamous lineages called Kaka. According to Allen,¹³⁴ these

¹²⁹ J. H. Greenberg, *Studies in African Linguistic Classification*, (New Haven: Compass, 1955), 26.

¹³⁰ J. P. Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo Part I: Lwoo Migrations*, 1-6.

¹³¹ J.O Dwyer, "The Acholi of Uganda", 20.

¹³² Okot P'Bitek, *Religion of the Central Luo*, (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1971), 1-3.

¹³³ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 75-80.

¹³⁴ T. Allen, Review of Ronald Atkinson's *The Roots of Ethnicity. The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda before 1800*, in *Africa*, 66 (3), (1996), 472-475.

groupings may be portrayed as “close relatives”, as they also refer to women who have been married into the group.

Girling’s study of the Acholi indicates that the household was the largest unit that could maintain a separate economic existence with a division of labour based on sex. A collection of households whose heads were linked by agnatic kinship ties varied in size from place to place depending on the skeleton of the kinship network. Next in size was the village which often had an identity because of having a common ancestor. As Girling writes of the Acholi in the 1950s, “the village is a living reality, it is the social group into which they are born and spend the greater part of their lives (and) it plays a part in regulating their relations with other Acholi.¹³⁵ This was the basis in the development of clans”.

According to Bere, “the history of the Acholi is the story of the clans and, if this history is to be understood, it is necessary to consider the nature of these clans”.¹³⁶ Crazzolara has identified the groups (clans) which moved east of Pubungu as the Patiko, the Alero, and the Payera,¹³⁷ and argued that these groups are the raw material of Acholi history.

In this work, a clan will be used as a collective term for all those persons who believe themselves to be descended through the male line from the same ancestor. The common ancestor is so remote that no clan member can show

¹³⁵ F.K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 82.

¹³⁶ R. M. Bere, “An Outline of Acholi History”, 6.

¹³⁷ J.P. Crazzolara, *The Lwoo Part I: Lwoo Migration*, (Verona: Museum Combonianum, 1950), 1-10.

with confidence an unbroken line connecting him with the founder, but this does not hinder his descendants from considering themselves “brothers”. Even larger clans, which are widely dispersed, have members who know each other as “brothers”.¹³⁸

Secondly, since clans are hardly found alone, their associations with each other are also to be called clans. This is a simple recognition of the fact that a large and powerful clan is usually swelled by small ones to whom it offers protection. The leader of the historically most important clan is usually the leader of such an “associated” clan group, although each clan would continue to recognize its own traditional leaders.

In the 19th century, there were probably several hundred groups which would qualify under the above definition of clan. According to Dwyer, the number of these clans constituted about thirty chiefdoms in today’s Acholi region.¹³⁹ The Payera were probably the largest and strongest partly because they occupied the central region of Acholiland. These clans were grouped together under independent rwodi (plural of rwot). The rwot was “owner” of the land and was descended from an aristocratic lineage (Kal), which formed the core, surrounded by various other common lineages (Labong).

¹³⁸ R. M. Bere, “An Outline of Acholi History”, 6.

¹³⁹ Different sources give different numbers with regard to chiefdoms in Acholi then. For instance J.O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda”, 32; R.R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 77; while F. Uma, “Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relations”, 1, puts it at 60. What this shows, irrespective of this difference, is that the history of Acholiland then was more of clans and chiefdoms than a single ethnic entity.

The nineteenth century produced several contradictory reports on the position and power of the rwodi (plural of rwot). In some, the office of the rwodi is depicted as a central authority, and the man himself as possessing political powers. In others, he is portrayed as a person with no real political power of enforcement, but dependent on consensus with his “subjects” who could drive him out or abandon him and seek a new rwot.¹⁴⁰ This last point seems to have more credibility partly because the rwodi had no powers over the various clans in his chieftdom or kingdom and certain clan heads even led their people away for one reason or another. For instance, certain clans of Payera left Paira East and settled in what is now known as Anaka because of the maladministration of the Nubians. When the Nubians left and rwot Awich ordered the clans-Padyek, Oria, Paduny, Pawatomeru, Patira and Alokulum to rejoin their brothers in Paira East, the leaders of these clans openly refused.¹⁴¹ In fact, both descriptions can be considered as justified. These two possibilities bear witness to the dynamic social world in which the Acholi later congealed into an ethnic group. Such were the basic features that came to characterize Acholi society from the late seventeenth to through the nineteenth century.

Acholi Collective Ethnic Identity

There is controversy over when different African societies (Acholi included) congealed as collective ethnic identities. Anthropologists most often conclude that ethnic identity is a construction and is, sometimes, even instrumentally constructed. In other words, ethnic identity is formed, constructed, invented,

¹⁴⁰ H. Behrend, *Alice Lakwena, and the Holy Spirits*, 15.

¹⁴¹ K. F. Uma, “Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relations in the Nineteenth Century”, 11-12.

even imagined and politically manipulated.¹⁴² It is the outcome of “social relations wrought in historical particularities.¹⁴³ The opposite approach discusses ethnic identity as natural, static and immutable, like race, a primordial essence that is passed on from generation to generation and cultures as fixed texts.¹⁴⁴

According to Behrend, the Acholi as a collective ethnic identity did not exist in pre-colonial times. The ethnonym came into usage during the colonial period. At that time, “there was no real Acholi ethnic identity but only localized clan identities”. When the colonialists created the Acholi district, they were “thus creating an ethnic group that had not existed before”.¹⁴⁵ Her main contention is that colonial rule was instrumental in the formation of an over-all ethnic belonging among the many Acholi clans.

This kind of representation that strongly relates ethnic identity to the colonial era and manipulation has been advanced elsewhere by Okuku, Allen and others.¹⁴⁶ Nelson Kasfir contends that “in Anglophone Africa, what happened was that the colonial regimes, administratively created ethnic units (tribes) as we think of today”.¹⁴⁷ This position is reinforced by Donald Gelfand and Russell when they contend that “Ethnic development occurs when hitherto, different

¹⁴² T. Shibutani & K. Kwan, *Ethnic Stratification: A Comparative Approach*, (New York: MacMillan, 1969), 263.

See also L. Robertson, “The Constructed Nature of Ethnopolitics”, *International Politics*, 34 (1997), 267.

¹⁴³ B. Lindgren, “The Politics of Ndebele Ethnicity: Origins, Nationality and Gender in Southern Zimbabwe”, Uppsala: Uppsala University, PhD Thesis in Cultural Anthropology, 2002, 50.

¹⁴⁴ Here, ethnic identities are regarded as biological. One is born in an ethnic group and dies in it. The contention here is culture is a fundamental mandate in ethnicity. It has come to be known as primordialism.

¹⁴⁵ H. Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits*, 18.

¹⁴⁶ J. Okuku, “Ethnicity, State Power and the Democratisation Process in Uganda”, 6. See also T. Allen, “Ethnicity and Tribalism on the Sudan-Uganda border,” 40.

¹⁴⁷ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena: Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics, with a Case Study of Uganda*, 82.

and independent communities are brought together under a single administrative umbrella”.¹⁴⁸ There is also the Terence Rangerian view of the invention of ethnicity. This is the notion of the constructed or “invented” nature of ethnicity or ethnicity as an “imagined” community, as politics. Terence Ranger argues that ethnic identities like that of the Acholi were invented by colonialism. He contends that in Africa, as in India, British colonialists invented ethnic groups so that they would easily exert authority over a large population by asserting authority over the indigenous ruling classes.¹⁴⁹ As a result of this process and to fit in the British policy of divide and rule, ethnic identities like Acholi were created and have since remained a feature in Ugandan politics.

Sverker Finnström¹⁵⁰ has not only disagreed with the central idea propagated by supporters of the theory of constructionism of ethnicity but also with the contention that Acholi ethnic identity was a colonial creation. According to Sverker Finnström, the idea that Acholi is a colonial creation is questionable on the ground that the historical forebears of the Acholi also lived and socialised with each other before Europeans discovered their land and put a name to it in writing, or put borders on the map. He therefore hesitates to conclude that Acholi ethnic identity was a colonial invention simply because it was labelled tribal or because colonial agents were the first to write down the denomination “Acholi”.¹⁵¹ Dwyer goes further to suggest that the idea of a common Acholi

¹⁴⁸ D. E. Gelfand and D. Russell *Ethnic Conflicts and Power: A Cross-National Perspective*, (New York: John Wiley and Son Inc., 1973) expounded the idea that ethnic identities were bound together to make what became colonial territories without due consideration to their differences and particularistic interests.

¹⁴⁹ T. Ranger, and Hobsbawn (Eds.), 1983, *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 221.

¹⁵⁰ F. Sverker, *Living with Bad Surrounding*, 63.

¹⁵¹ F. Sverker, *Living with Bad Surrounding*, 63.

identity ought to be traced to pre-colonial times, although the individual Acholi's first awareness was of his (or her) clan. He points out that the Acholi first called themselves by referring to the clans they belonged to than by the collective name-Acholi.¹⁵² This argument is more elaborated and refined by Atkinson.¹⁵³

Whereas our main objective is not to trace the origin of Acholi collective belonging as was the case with Dwyer and Atkinson, it will still serve our purpose when we investigate ethnicity and conflict later in this work. This study's position is that ethnicity is a social construct and that ethnic identities are a colonial invention in a dynamic process.

Crazzolaro believes that each Acholi ruler was completely independent both of other Acholi and also of foreign control. The Acholi tribe, he writes, "consisted and to some extent still consists of small kingdoms or chiefdoms (i.e. groups ruled by a rwot or king) and depended on nobody else". This absolute independence from each other and from outside influence (e.g. Bunyoro), he asserts "must be stressed in the face of some sporadic assertions from interested parties who wish to glorify themselves at the expense of the Acholi".¹⁵⁴

He makes the same point elsewhere again, that "all of the twenty to thirty remaining independent chiefdoms were of about the same size; none of them

¹⁵² J.O. Dwyer, *The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism*, 12.

¹⁵³ R. R. Atkinson. *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 11-12.

¹⁵⁴ J.P. Crazzolaro, *A Study of the Acoli Language, Grammar & Vocabulary*, (London: Oxford University Press), viii.

had sovereign rights of any kind over the others, in spite of some assertions as of Bunyoro and Payira to the contrary”.¹⁵⁵

The above position is further reinforced by R. M. Bere when he states that,

the history of the Acholi is the story of the clans and if that history is to be understood it is necessary to consider briefly the nature of these clans. Each was, and to some extent still is, a separate political entity with its own history and occasionally customs.¹⁵⁶

In so far as government was concerned “they recognize no hereditary chiefs and bow their knees to no overlords, but they pay deep respect to clan heads and rain makers”.¹⁵⁷

Each of the clan domains, for instance, had its own Jok (Spirit) on which it depended for success in agriculture, hunting and war.¹⁵⁸ The authority of the Jok did not extend beyond the clans’ domains. Thus, any power which one clan did have over another had no ritual or religious sanction. Such power was invariably temporary because the control was never completely secure and never received organizational recognition in the political structure of the society. As Girling notes, it could be because traditional links between the clans were horizontal, not vertical.¹⁵⁹

The bond between or among clans was strengthened through intermarriage, then encouraged in Acholi among members of the royal families, as well as the

¹⁵⁵ J.P. Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo People*, 18.

¹⁵⁶ R. M. Bere, “An Outline of Acholi History”, 1.

¹⁵⁷ R. M. Bere, “An Outline of Acholi History”, 1.

¹⁵⁸ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 52.

¹⁵⁹ F.K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 156.

commoners of the chiefdoms. Thus, a man from Padibe could get a wife from Kochi and a girl from Atyak was free to pick a husband from any part of Acholi, provided that the bridegroom and bride were upright persons and were not suspected of being wizards.¹⁶⁰ Such intermarriages were important for the preservation of peace and friendship in that the Acholi hesitated to take up arms against their neighbours who were relatives by marriage.

Administratively, the colonial government was very much responsible for the creation of the districts of Gulu (1910) and Chua (1914). Later in 1937, these two districts were amalgamated to create one Acholi District. Bere, an agent of the colonial Administration, wrote in 1947:

The urgent trend of modern administration has been to bring the clans together and to make the Acholi conscious of their unit as a single people, without destroying their individual background. To this end, the districts of Gulu and Chua (today's Kitgum and Pader) were amalgamated in 1937, when a unified Acholi District was formed with its headquarters at Gulu. At the same time, the Acholi Council, with seats, not only for chiefs but for representation of the people from all parts of the country, was brought into being.¹⁶¹

It is reasonable to argue that these clans were formed for reasons of common interest such as defence or to deal with a disaster and could break apart with ease as well on the occasion of the slightest disagreement. By the end of the 18th century, as Atkinson notes, the broad unity that characterized Acholiland by the mid 19th century had not taken on concrete, practical forms of expression. Neither the area nor the people who inhabited it were yet perceived as a unit either by the people themselves or by neighbouring groups. One

¹⁶⁰ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 2.

¹⁶¹ R. M. Bere, "An Outline of Acholi History", 8.

indication of this is that neither area nor people were identified by a name that was both inclusive of the whole and exclusive of others.¹⁶² It is not in doubt that colonial practices were powerful instruments in the making of more rigid ethnic boundaries and divide in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa.¹⁶³

In addition, the market economy of the colonialists was to restrict people's movements over ethnic borders. In pre-colonial times, salt extracted on the shores of Lake Albert found its way to other places and so did iron hoes and spearheads produced in Bunyoro, while bark cloth made in Buganda found its way to Alur chiefs in the West Nile region. Acholi chiefs (rwots) were sometimes dressed in bark-cloth made in Bunyoro. The Lango exchanged cattle for iron tools manufactured by the Acholi.¹⁶⁴ Many of these products, exchanged in trade networks that criss-crossed the region, could not compete with the cheap goods mass-produced in British factories, which were made available in stores all over the Ugandan protectorate.¹⁶⁵ In this way, the colonialists seized the control over the market and they narrowed the room for action that Africans had previously had in these matters. An important feature of non-colonial interregional alliance making and networking weakened, as a result.¹⁶⁶

Colonial rule and its mechanisms ensured that a people congealed in a district or ethnic group could not voluntarily and easily break apart otherwise colonial

¹⁶² R.R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 262.

¹⁶³ J. Lonsdale, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism", in Kaarsholm and J. Hultin (Eds.), *Invention and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism*, (Roskilde, University: International Development Studies, Occasional paper, 11 (1994), 134.

¹⁶⁴ J. Lonsdale, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism", 134.

¹⁶⁵ S. R. Karugire, *The Roots of Political Instability in Uganda*, 24.

¹⁶⁶ S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 128.

policies and administration in general would collapse. Once several clans were brought together and restricted under appointed leaders and systems, their consciousness as one people beyond clans developed especially against a common enemy- the British.

The above discussion reveals the nature of the debate on the history of the Acholi people. The primary aim of the discussion is not to establish the origin of the Acholi but to emphasize that the sense of collective belonging in Acholiland started with colonialism. For these reasons and despite the objections of Ronald Atkinson, Dwyer and Sverker Finnstrom, the Behrend version on Acholi ethnic identity, which maintains that there was no real Acholi ethnic identity but only localised clan identities, will be used in this work.

Acholi relations with neighbours

There is considerable disagreement regarding the relationship among the different Acholi leaders (rwodi) and between the people of Acholiland and their neighbours in the days before European rule. Crazzolaro has insisted that each Acholi rwot was independent both of other Acholi authorities and of foreign control (for example Bunyoro).¹⁶⁷ Bere is not quite emphatic and simply states that each Acholi clan was a “separate political entity”¹⁶⁸. Girling feels that although each Acholi (rwot) had a degree of relative independence and there was never any formal political control exercised by the Banyoro over the Acholi, they still recognized the Bakama of Bunyoro as their suzerains.¹⁶⁹ This seems true

¹⁶⁷ J. P. Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo People*, 18.

¹⁶⁸ R. M. Bere, “An Outline of Acholi History”, 8.

¹⁶⁹ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 120.

because in the mid nineteenth century the large Payera clan that had close ties with Bunyoro seemed to enjoy the respect of most other Acholi clans. Samuel Baker considered Rwot Chamo of Payera to be the paramount chief of the Acholi. Yet, says Girling, this was “allegiance owed by the weaker to the stronger, and based on esteem rather than conquest”.¹⁷⁰

In spite of these confusions, Rwot Chamo and his son Awich were able to maintain their traditional ties with Bunyoro; duly paying respect on ceremonial occasions to the common ancestors they shared: Labongo. Gifts and ambassadors were regularly exchanged. Acholi and Bunyoro were also to have a short-lived alliance against the invading Europeans.¹⁷¹

Relations between the Acholi and their neighbours, the Langi, were invariably strained at different times. The Langi appeared to have had more cattle than the Acholi and the temptation to raid for them was very great. Chiefdoms like Puranga and Lira-Palwo did raid the Lango area. The hostility between Puranga, Lira-Palwo and the Langi went back to the years before 1800. The Acholi also fought the Madi on several occasions. War was usually declared by either the Acholi or the Madi as a result of feuds occurring during hunting campaigns, in which the Acholi and Madi lost some of their men.¹⁷²

On the eastern frontier generally, the Acholi and the Ateker people lived in unity and peacefully until relations were poisoned by the Nubians who organized

¹⁷⁰F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 120.

¹⁷¹J.M. Gray, “Rwot Ochama of Payera” in *Uganda Journal*, 12 (2) (1948), 121-128.

¹⁷²F. K. Uma, “Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relations in the Nineteenth Century”, 10.

raids into the Dodoth County with the support of the Acholi. After the Nubians left, the Acholi organized their first full-scale war against the Jie.¹⁷³ The Acholi were disastrously defeated and a formal peace was concluded. In accounting for this defeat, most informants today list among the causes the fact that the Acholi were in the wrong in carrying war into Jie County and thus the gods favoured the Jie.¹⁷⁴

It must, however, be emphasized that these wars were less serious than those fought with and outside Acholi when the Arabs and Nubians introduced firearms. By leading combined forces of the Acholi chiefdoms against the Madi, Lango-Omiro and the Lango-Dyang for cattle and slaves, the Nubians created bitter feelings between the Acholi and neighbouring societies with which they used to be on good terms. Within Acholi itself, the Nubians created enmity among several Acholi chiefdoms like Payera and Padibe which had been friendly chiefdoms previously.¹⁷⁵ Even before British colonial rule was imposed in Acholiland, therefore, situations of lawlessness and conflict already existed, but at very low levels.

Acholi Experience with Aliens

The first known contact between the Acholi and peoples beyond Equatoria (present-day Southern Sudan and Northern Uganda) was with Arabs and the Egyptians in the mid-nineteenth century. The origins of this alien thrust into Equatoria lay in the invasions of the Khedive Muhammed Ali in the 1820s.

¹⁷³ J. B. Webster, "The Peopling of Agago", 7.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with A. Okello, 15 March, 2007.

¹⁷⁵ F. K. Uma, "Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relations in the Nineteenth Century", 11.

Aggressive traders followed this invasion to the town of Khartoum and these “Khartoumers” began to establish trading empires in the Equatorial region of the Nile.¹⁷⁶ The main products extracted were ivory and slaves. Their notable trading stations were located at Pabo, Ajulu, Pajule, Padibe, Jebel Labu (Kalongo). The most important centres of these, however, were Patiko in the Central Zone and Pabo and Padibe in the western Zone.¹⁷⁷

According to Uma, there was relative peace and stability within Acholi society before the advent of Arabs and Nubians in the mid-nineteenth century largely because the Acholi regarded themselves as brothers in a large sense.¹⁷⁸ The Acholi based their argument on the fact that all the people who came into Acholi were originally from the Sudan and were led by Lwo. Importantly, also the Arabs who came into Acholiland were merely commercialists or commercial adventurers who did not, initially, interfere with or try to control the political system of Acholi society. As Girling notes, “the Arabs were then content to maintain purely commercial relations”.¹⁷⁹ Even when early Arab traders conducted raids, most of such raids were directed against the Acholi’s neighbours often with the assistance of the Acholi as allies. The main purpose of these raids was to acquire cattle, captives and Ivory.¹⁸⁰

In the early stages, Arab traders brought into Acholi many new items like copper bracelets, beads, saucepans, wooden boxes, clothes and firearms. They

¹⁷⁶ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 36.

¹⁷⁷ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda*, 267.

¹⁷⁸ F. K. Uma, “Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relations in the Nineteenth Century”, 11.

¹⁷⁹ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 121.

¹⁸⁰ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 269.

also brought into Acholi slaves and cattle captured in Madi and Bari in Southern Sudan, which they exchanged for Ivory with the Acholi. The Acholi acquired wives from such slaves and it was partly through this system that many people of foreign origin, like the Bari, Madi and Lango-Omiro were absorbed into Acholi society.¹⁸¹

Arab-Acholi relations were not always cordial. In the 1860s, and largely through Acholi-Arab interaction, the Acholi rwodi acquired firearms in different quantities. The arrival of these ivory and slave traders, and the importation of rifles from the north fundamentally changed the status of the rwodi. Some of them even managed to build up private retinues of armed followers.¹⁸² Whereas such rwodi employed their small armies equipped with rifles to attack neighbouring chiefdoms and other ethnic groups, such as the Madi or Langi,¹⁸³ robbing cattle and enslaving women and children, some like Rwot Chamo of Payera and the rwot of Patiko later used such armies to expel Arabs out of their areas.¹⁸⁴

The exchange of rifles for ivory and slaves had catastrophic results in Acholi as in other parts of Africa. The reports on the “pacification” of Acholi at the beginning of the colonial period permit a rough estimate of the degree to which rifles had spread.¹⁸⁵ When the colonial administration began registering guns and disarming the Acholi, the chiefs of Gondokoro and Gulu alone possessed

¹⁸¹ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 269.

¹⁸² H. Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits*, 80.

¹⁸³ Langi are the people of Lango- neighbouring Luo cousins to the Acholi. Lango refers to the homeland of the Langi people.

¹⁸⁴ F. K. Uma, “Acoli-Arab-Nubian Relations in the Nineteenth Century”, 11.

¹⁸⁵ J. R. Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, (London: T.S V, Boardman, 1947), 51.

almost 1500 rifles.¹⁸⁶ This also illustrates how the spread of firearms as a prelude to armed conflicts in the area predates the colonial period.

The first European in Acholiland was a Maltese trader named Amabile, who established a trading post near Palero in 1861. Another European, Miami, followed shortly.¹⁸⁷ There is no evidence that any of these men engaged in slave trading and their activities remained almost inconsequential.

The period of Khedive Ismael Pasha (1869-1879) marked a new phase of alien intrusion into Acholiland. Under the influence of both the ideas and finances of Europe, Khedive Ismael initiated a policy of eradicating the trade in slaves. For this purpose, Europeans were employed and the process of evicting the “merchant-rulers” was begun under Samuel Baker and Charles Gordon. The famous meeting of Speke and Baker at Gondokoro in February, 1863, can be said to mark the beginning of British interest in the area. Baker is still fondly remembered in Acholiland, over a century after his first visit. The Acholi respected his person partly because he had driven out the hated Arab traders and slavers. According to Dwyer, his success might have been due to the fact that he established good relations with Rwot Chamo of Payera clan, who he considered the leader of all Acholi.¹⁸⁸ This may have been true de-facto in the 1870s, but it was certainly not true de jure: Baker’s diplomatic efforts would have been considerably more difficult had he been forced to deal with several Acholi rwoodi.

¹⁸⁶ See Native Reports, 1910 (Entebbe: Entebbe Archives, 1910), 6.

¹⁸⁷ J. H. Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, (London: J.M. Dent and Company, 1863), 111.

¹⁸⁸ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 37.

Gordon and his successor as Governor of Equatoria, Emin Pasha, did not often visit Acholiland in person and their administrations are remembered by the Acholi primarily because of their notorious Nubian troops. The demand made on the Acholi by these troops was for food but the only thing that the Acholi people received in return for this form of taxation was protection from a no longer menacing enemy.¹⁸⁹

Pressure from external powers was renewed but in a new guise. The 1880s saw a number of attempts by followers of the Mahdi to push into the Egyptian province of Equatoria. They had little success there except in isolating Emin Pasha and his garrison. The province was “relieved” by Stanley’s famous expedition in 1889. Emin Pasha was convinced to go to the coast and those of his soldiers who did not accompany him disbanded to the west of the Nile.¹⁹⁰

Acholiland was free from alien domination, violence and intimidation which were endemic to the exploration mission. As Fabian notes in his study of nineteenth century Central Africa travelogues, “No sharp line separated exploration from military action”.¹⁹¹ Acholiland was free from alien domination only temporarily because more serious pressure came from a new alien threat—the British colonialists.

¹⁸⁹ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 37.

¹⁹⁰ D. A. Low, *Buganda in Modern History*, 106.

¹⁹¹ J. Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 146.

In conclusion, the history of Acholi during the initial stages of the imperial condition was not entirely peaceful. Arabs and Nubians promoted internal division in a community that had not yet congealed as a political unit or force enough to withstand such division and manipulation. Consequently, as Webster and Onyango-Ku-Odongo have noted, “by 1872 Arab traders had already created very unstable conditions in Acholiland”. Generally, “life in Acholiland then was that of a war of each against all”.¹⁹² Torn apart by feuds and internal strife and greed and encouraged by Nubians in the absence of a strong centralised system like Buganda’s, the Acholi people could not stand together and face their common enemy. The traders could easily raid their homes at will, at any time and take food as well as other valuables.¹⁹³ The arrival of the British colonialists found the Acholi in such a state and partly explains why they fell easy prey to the British and their divide and rule policy. Arabs and Nubians initiated the breakdown of the Acholi social fabric; the British intensified the process and Uganda’s post-colonial leaders simply exacerbated it to even higher levels. This fits well with Atkinson’s observations that,

Uganda’s recent and distant past do relate, in fairly direct, if perverse, ways. Many of the events and relationships characteristic of Uganda’s recent history, including political violence, have ultimately been bound up with Uganda’s perception of their social and ethnic identity.¹⁹⁴

Therefore, it is wrong to blame the current conflicts in Acholiland entirely on the Acholi or on the myth of Acholi being warlike. It is necessary to consider the conflicts as a result of Uganda’s chequered pre-colonial, colonial and post-

¹⁹² J. B. Webster & Onyango-Ku- Odongo, “The Peopling of Agago”, 212.

¹⁹³ J.B. Webster & Onyango-Ku- Odongo, “The Peopling of Agago”, 212.

¹⁹⁴ R. R Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 1.



colonial History. Imperial conditions during the period of British control simply intensified the already difficult situation.

BRITISH IMPERIALISM IN ACHOLILAND 1890-1962

This chapter examines how British colonialism was rooted in Acholiland in order to analyse its impact on the socio-economic and political life and institutions of the area.

Introduction

Acholiland was marginal in many ways to early British colonial rule. It was viewed as occupied by a tribe of a quite different and inferior order and its people (the Acholi) were perceived as “naturally lazy”¹⁹⁵ and as having little to contribute to the “development” of the colonial economy. According to Ronald Atkinson Acholiland was marginal in three main ways to early colonial rule.¹⁹⁶ First, it was a dry and sparsely populated land located far to the north and of limited interest to those at the centre of the colonial endeavour in Buganda. When new British Commissioner Hesketh Bell, visited the region in 1906, he was unimpressed by northern Uganda, describing it as “a country with little or no promise of successful development in which I cannot think of a single product that might be grown...which will pay for the cost of carriage to the seaboard”.¹⁹⁷

In addition, the Acholi people were considered “naturally lazy” and averse to work simply because the initial Acholi response to peasant cash cropping and

¹⁹⁵ A. D. Roberts, “The Sub-Imperialism of the Baganda”, in *Journal of African History*, 111, 3 (1962), 12 -79.

¹⁹⁶ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 4-5.

¹⁹⁷ J. P. Barber, “The Moving Frontier of British Imperialism in Northern Uganda”, 31.

labour migration to the south was not enthusiastic. To British colonial administrators in Buganda like Hesketh Bell, direct involvement in Acholiland offered heavy expenditure without any reward. They also argued that extending colonial administration to northern Uganda would “bring into the Protectorate a group of tribes whose organization and customs were completely different from the Bantu Kingdoms that formed the core of Uganda.”¹⁹⁸

Thirdly, Acholi social and cultural practices, especially the wearing of minimal clothing, were considered primitive and backward. Worse still, their decentralized and small scale political organization made them neither an especially feared enemy nor a valued ally.¹⁹⁹ As Berber put it,

No tribe in Northern Uganda (Acholiland included) had an effective central organization, which made it powerful enough to capture the attention of the British. The tribes were seen neither as potential threats to established British interests nor as potential allies to share the burden of administrative expansion.²⁰⁰

Marginal and inferior as they were considered, however, the Acholi were gradually incorporated into the colonial political economy. In this study, we contend that such stereotyping of the Acholi and ethnic manipulation that was the hallmark of British colonial politics of “divide and rule” greatly laid the foundation on which post-independence politics was developed. This will offer a good base from which to anchor our argument that conflict in post-colonial Acholiland can be traced to the history of the area in the colonial period. We

¹⁹⁸ A. D. Roberts, “The Sub-Imperialism of the Baganda”, 70.

¹⁹⁹ R.R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 4-5.

²⁰⁰ J.P. Berber, “The Moving Frontier”, 32.

seek to identify the major trends that shaped the region's post-colonial experience from its colonial history.

The Period 1890-1910

In 1889, Emin Pasha's administration of Egypt's Equatorial Province ended when he was persuaded to withdraw to the coast with Henry Stanley's famous expedition which had come so far to relieve him. Emin Pasha was Governor of Equatoria Province, then under the Khedives of Egypt. In the 1820s, Khedive Ali, ruler of Egypt invaded present-day Sudan and took control of it as its vassal state. This alien thrust into Sudan extended southwards into what became the Equatorial Province (present day Southern Sudan and Northern Uganda).²⁰¹

The first administrators of the Equatorial Province used the Nubians (also called the Sudanese soldiers by the Acholi) to consolidate their imperial control over Southern Sudan and Northern Uganda. As employees of the Egyptian government, they helped consolidate Egypt's control over Acholiland and governed it as one of Egypt's territories in order to stop the slave trade and modern civilization.²⁰²

In the period of Khedive Ismail Pasha as ruler or the Khedive of Egypt (1863-1879), changes took place in the administration of the Equatorial province. Under the influence of both the ideas and finances of Europe, Ismail initiated a policy of eradicating slave trading. For this purpose, Europeans were employed;

²⁰¹ J. O. Dwyer, "The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism", 36.

²⁰² F.K. Uma, "Acoli-Arabs-Nubian Relations," 42.

first, Samuel Baker, then Charles Gordon and, later, Emin Pasha.²⁰³ Emin Pasha was charged with the responsibility of administering Egypt's Equatorial province between 1885 and 1889. Like his predecessor Charles Gordon, who had been killed by the Mahdist revolt in 1885, Emin Pasha did not often visit Acholiland in person and his administration largely relied on the continued use of Nubian troops.²⁰⁴

During his tenure as the leading Turko-Egyptian administrator in the Equatorial province, Emin Pasha had enlisted Nubians (or Sudanese) troops to reinforce his policies in the Province. When he was forced to abandon Equatorial Province following the Mahdist nationalist uprising against Turko-Egyptian administrators and imperial control, these troops were left under the command of Selim Bey. Under Selim Bey, the Sudanese soldiers (as the Acholi referred to them) acted freely and were, most times, out of control; raping women, raiding the Acholi for food and killing at will.²⁰⁵

When Uganda was declared a British protectorate in 1894, these Sudanese soldiers, then under Salim Bey, became the 'askaris' or 'guards' of the British administration. Later, the British used them to defeat the resistance of King Mwanga of Buganda in 1894 and also to conquer Bunyoro by 1896.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ J. H. Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, 592.

²⁰⁴ Acholiland became part of the Equatorial province of Egypt during Turko-Egyptian Administration. Nubians acted as agents of Egyptian Khedives. In Acholiland, the Nubians (Employees of Egypt) were also referred to as Sudanese soldiers.

²⁰⁵ R. Oliver, "Some Factors in the British Occupation of East Africa," 60.

²⁰⁶ F. K. Uma, "Acoli-Arabs-Nubian Relations, 1-2.

Before the coming of Arabs into Acholiland, there was relative peace and stability within Acholi because the Acholi regarded themselves, largely, as brothers. They based their argument on the fact that all the people now living in Acholiland came originally from the southern Sudan led by Lwo.²⁰⁷

In the first place, many of the royal families were related through marriage. For instance, the mother of rwot (Chief) Camo of Paira and the grandmother of rwot Ogwok of Padibe were daughters of rwot Bwomono of Palabek. The mother of rwot (chief) Alinga of Atyak was also the daughter of the rwot of Palabek.²⁰⁸

Links were also created by members of different clans that recognized common ancestry. For instance, the three branches of the Bobi clan which are found in Puranga, Padibe and Pajule claim that they are related. The Agoro clan which settled in Palaro in the 19th century migrated from Agoro in East Acholi. In Puranga, the Paciko clan claims common ancestry with the Paciko in Pairo.²⁰⁹ The inter-clan links described above helped to bring about cordial relationships among the people of Acholi before the advent of Arabs. The spirit of brotherhood that had developed was abruptly destroyed by the Arab-inspired slave trade, slave raids and accompanying wars and manipulation of one clan against the other. It was in this way that alien Arab imperialism in Acholiland divided the people and left them to be manipulated by later alien forces.

²⁰⁷ R. S. Anywar, *Acoli Kiker Megi* (Kampala: Eagle Press, 1954), 11.

²⁰⁸ F. K. Uma, "Acoli-Arabs-Nubian Relations", 3.

²⁰⁹ F. K. Uma, "Acoli-Arabs-Nubian Relations", 3-4.

Whereas Dwyer concurs that the Acholi were indeed left to their own devices, he still maintains that the years (1889-1899) were years of “excitement and achievement in Acholiland”.²¹⁰ In support of his position, he believes that for the first time in nearly half a century, the Acholi were able to establish their own political traditions in the ten years, in the absence of powerful alien intruders. By the 1870s, Arab traders in slaves and ivory had been ousted through the efforts of Khedive Ismail Pasha and his European administrators of the Equatorial Province, first Samuel Baker and, later, Emin Pash. When the Mahdist Nationalist revolt ended Turko-Egyptian administration in southern Sudan and northern Uganda (Acholiland) in 1889, Acholiland was left free of alien rule until the British had established themselves firmly in the north of their Ugandan Protectorate by opening a station at Gulu in Acholiland in 1910.²¹¹ Acholiland, therefore, remained peaceful and free from pillage from 1888 to 1898. The British first settled at Paraa (Murchison Falls) on the bank of the River Nile. They did not, however, stay at this site for long and soon established other administrative posts at Wadelai and at Guruguru in Lamogi in Acholiland.²¹²

Moving Frontier of British Imperialism in Acholiland

The extension of British Imperialism into northern Uganda, including Acholiland, was a gradual exercise and was accomplished much later than in the South. According to J.P. Barber, the extension of British control across

²¹⁰ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 58.

²¹¹ D.A. Low, *Buganda in Modern History*, 104.

²¹² J. B. Webster & Onyango-Ku-Odongo, “The Peopling of Agago”, 167.

northern Uganda was a “hesitant and timid piece of colonization”.²¹³ The policy revolved around the dispute between those who were for administrative expansion and those who favoured concentration upon the Bantu areas of the protectorate. It was the “concentrators” and notably Hesketh Bell, backed up by the British government, who dominated policy after Harry Johnstone’s departure in 1901.²¹⁴

British operations in northern Uganda in the 1890s, generally, were not dictated by their interests in Acholiland that forms the largest portion of this region or other neighbouring peoples. After the British decided to establish a protectorate over Uganda in 1894, there were only two absolutes in the policy handed down from the foreign office in London. The first was that the kingdom of Buganda should be the headquarters of the administration and the second was to establish a foothold on the Upper Nile from which to observe the movements of the Belgians and the French. In 1882, British forces occupied Egypt as one of their African colonies. After the British occupation, imperial struggles between the British and French were over the Nile valley countries. This was contained in what British administrator, Lord Salisbury, described as the ‘Nile valley strategy’. Uganda remained the pivot of this strategy.

During the reign of Khedive Ismail Pasha in Egypt between 1863 and 1879, French and British traders had noticeable investments in Egypt and shares in

²¹³ J. P. Barber, “The Moving Frontier of British Imperialism”, 41.

²¹⁴ Sir Harry Johnstone was a special commissioner, appointed by the British Government to place the Administration of the Uganda Protectorate on a satisfactory permanent footing. He had served in Cameroon and as Commissioner in British Central Africa (Malawi). He was to ensure that Uganda was effectively occupied and “developed”. He arrived at Kampala on 20th September, 1899.

the Suez Canal project. Once Egypt became bankrupt and could not pay back borrowed funds from both the British and French, politicians from these two imperial countries decided to take over Egypt as a dual colony.²¹⁵ The French failed to implement the immediate takeover of Egypt due to parliamentary and administrative bureaucracy.

In 1882 the British immediately took control of Egypt, to the annoyance of French politicians. In their frustrations, the French design after 1882 was to occupy any country through which the River Nile flowed, as a way to deter British cotton development in Egypt. In June 1895, British Intelligence at Cairo warned that:

Rumors have been in Cairo of the arrival of a French expedition in the Barhr-El-Ghazel region of Sudan. There is no reason to assume that the arrival of French parties in that neighbourhood is impossible or unlikely.²¹⁶

It was with the object of forestalling the possibility of the French taking over northern Uganda and Southern Sudan (former Equatorial Province) that the British government ordered Major L. Macdonald to lead an exploratory expedition northwards from Buganda in Southern Uganda. Macdonald was instructed to confirm British claims to northern Uganda by establishing military and administrative posts and hoisting the British flag in the area.²¹⁷

The threat to the Upper Nile came from Leopold II King of Belgium, then the colonial force in Congo in April 1893. As the British administrator in Uganda

²¹⁵ R. Robinson & J. Ghallager, *Africa and the Victorians, The Official Mind of Imperialism*, (London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1981), 321.

²¹⁶ Intelligence Report: Egypt, no 38, Confidential Report, 18 June 1895, bound as Confidential Print in F.O. 78/4986.

²¹⁷ J.P. Berber, "The Moving Frontier of British Imperialism", 25.

then put it in a letter to the Queen of England; “The sovereign of Congo is a large filibustering force into the British sphere of influence and it has occupied Lado (current West Nile region of Uganda), an important post on the Nile”.²¹⁸ Leopold II’s ambition was to build an extensive colonial empire for Belgium, stretching from the Congo to Zanzibar on the East African coast and encompassing modern northern Uganda. Therefore, even when the British official position was not to effectively occupy northern Uganda because it was still regarded as an area with little to offer in the way of commerce and an area whose people had not yet become accustomed to the sojourn of white men in their midst,²¹⁹ French and Belgian threats made the British change their attitude to the effective occupation of northern Uganda by 1906.

Up to 1898, British administration in Uganda was confined to the four kingdoms of Buganda, Bunyoro, Toro and Ankole, the district of Busoga and to a line of stations along the supply route from Mombasa. The great stretch of country to the north, between the Nile and Lake Rudolph was completely unadministered and unexplored. Its people were left to fend for themselves. The British attitude about Acholiland only depended on vital political and economic interests that they felt were under threat from different colonial powers at different times, such as the French and also in order to contain Ethiopian elephant hunters.

²¹⁸ The best account of Leopold’s ambitions on the River Nile is in J. Stengers, “La Première Tentative de Resprise du Congo par la Belgique; *Bulletin de la Géographie*, LXIII, (1959), 1-80.

²¹⁹ AF No. 7 (1900) Command 671 instructions to Sadler 28/1/1902.

Between 1898 and 1904, northern Uganda was still largely free of British imperial control, as compared to southern Uganda, then already effectively occupied. Ethiopian elephant hunters exploited this vacuum to intensify their unrestricted killing of elephants for ivory and to trade their guns with Acholi rival chiefs (rwots). As Karugire notes,

the activities of the Ethiopian traders were so harmful that by 1914, the vast herds of elephants of North-Eastern Uganda were virtually exhausted and this, in turn, led to the sharp decline in the revenue the protectorate had been used to collecting from this source (sale of ivory). Additionally, through the same ivory hunters the people of northern Uganda were getting and accumulating large quantities of arms and this worried the protectorate administration, especially as an increasing number of breach loaders—considered to be sophisticated weapons by the standard of those days were finding their way into Acholiland.²²⁰

Such were the events, in addition to the French and Belgium threats discussed earlier, which gradually changed British policy and attitude about directly controlling northern Uganda. Thus, clearly, northern Uganda was not occupied because it was considered economically viable to British imperial interests but much more because of considerable threats to British safe occupation of Southern Uganda. This thinking later developed into British divide and rule policy.

In July 1899, Sir Harry Johnstone went to Uganda as special Commissioner to reorganize the protectorate. Johnstone aimed at establishing an administration over the northern part of the Uganda Protectorate that was “economic and

²²⁰ S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 113-114.

efficient”.²²¹ For him, “economy and efficiency” meant a policy of expansion that was contrary to the position of the Foreign office in London. Although Harry Johnstone never visited Acholiland during his tenure, he had read with enthusiasm the reports of British Officers sent to the area, particularly those of Delme’-Redcliffe. He came to realize that northern Uganda was economically productive and British colonial control of the area would be of great economic value. The area had vast stock of elephants and, hence, ivory then unilaterally exploited by Ethiopian ivory traders. He wanted a formal declaration that the Uganda Protectorate extended to 5° north latitude between Lake Rudolf and the Nile, including Acholiland. The Foreign Office would not sanction such a claim, partly because official policy then was to concentrate in the South²²². Johnstone’s tenure came to an end and, likewise, his expansionist policy in the north.

Colonel Hayes Sadler was, henceforth, sent as the new commissioner to Uganda. The instruction given to the new Commissioner confirms our earlier position about British colonial politics and attitude about the Acholi. The instructions to Hayes Sadler stated that:

in the opinion of His Majesty’s Government, it is not desirable to push too quickly amongst tribes in outlying districts who have little to offer at the present in the way of commerce and who have not yet become accustomed to the sojourn of the White men in their midst.²²³

²²¹ F. O. C.P 7867, Johnstone-Landowne, 107/1901.

²²² Entebbe Archives, A17/1: 25/8/1900, Johnstone to Delme-Redcliffe.

²²³ For details on this British stereotype/ position and politics of divisionism, see AF No, 7, Cmd 671, Instructions to Sadler, 28/7/1902.

Sadler's policy was later described by Hesketh Bell as "merely keeping open the waterways and as little interference as possible with the wilder tribes of the interior".²²⁴

In one of his correspondences, Sadler reported that the trade through Gondokoro was "insignificant", and that the Nile Province (largely Acholiland) was "the most backward part of the Protectorate because of its distance from the headquarters, the difficulty of communication and the "poverty and primitive" character of its people who still feel the effects of the rule of Emin Pasha's mutinous soldiers followed by the Dervishes".²²⁵

Hesketh Bell was the strongest exponent of the Foreign office's 1902 policy of 'concentration' or keeping the British occupation to the more economically viable south and the strongest opponent of Harry Johnstone's policy of expansion. Bell did not consider that Acholiland itself could be productive. He thought the soil poor, the timber sparse and the prospect for the survival of sheep or cattle thin. This was a clear contrast to the writings of enthusiastic missionaries a few years before. Kitching, for one, had noted that "almost every village boasts some cattle".²²⁶ To Bell, Acholiland offered "heavy expenditure without any reward". Not only did he dismiss its commercial value, but he also strongly believed that Johnstone's northern expansion had more than territorial implications as it would bring into the protectorate a group of tribes whose

²²⁴ Entebbe Archives (E/A), 50/1906, Bell- Hesketh to Sadler, 13/9/1906.

²²⁵ Details in Sadler's Annual Report, 3/3/1903.

²²⁶ Correspondence from Sir Hesketh Bell to Secretary of State, Sept. 13.1906, C.O 53617.

organization and customs were completely different from that of the Bantu Kingdom and people who formed the core of Uganda.²²⁷

That the colonial government could afford to play the reluctant colonizer was a reflection of its attitude on the economic and political weaknesses of the northern tribes like the Acholi. British administrators like Bell strongly held the view that the tribes of the north (like the Acholi) presented no more than an administrative problem that would involve the British in endless petty squabbles while an administrative system was being imposed upon them. He also emphasized that “the natives were unwilling to submit to domination by chiefs”. There were “no powerful local authorities through which we might transmit our directions”.²²⁸ It is interesting to note how firmly Bell was committed to the Buganda model. His concern for what came to be called “indirect rule”, not only predated the experience of Lugard in Nigeria, but it also restricted his vision toward the possibility of administering so-called “stateless societies”.

Bell concluded by making apologies for a policy which would restrict the government’s active authority to within twenty miles of the river. Bell strongly believed that the resources of the Protectorate should not be frittered away “on inadequate efforts in outlying provinces” but should be concentrated “in the more favoured localities, where the soil is excellent, the people industrious and the country full of promise”. He decided, therefore, that in the north, “the

²²⁷ This kind of stereotype characterized British colonial politics of “divide and rule” in Uganda. Post-colonial rulers exacerbated such politics and this laid foundation for the turbulence that has characterized Acholiland since 1962.

²²⁸ Correspondence from Sir Hesketh Bell to Secretary of State, Sept. 13.1906, C.O 53617.

administration should be confined to a radius of 20 miles from the banks of the Nile river, that no responsibility should be accepted for tribes inland, that the troops at the Nile stations should be withdrawn and that the administrative status of the stations should be lowered from a Province to a District".²²⁹

Hesketh Bell's policy of administrative concentration was clear, but even then the north generally, Acholi in particular, could not be ignored completely by the British. It was partly the problem of the ivory traders that caught the attention of the British in the later years.

The policy which, since 1900, had given the ivory traders and hunters unrestricted freedom to hunt down large populations of elephants for ivory was severely criticized by a later Governor, Fredrick Jackson. In 1901, he wrote,

I consider as deplorable the conditions of affairs now existing in these parts (i.e. Acholiland and adjacent areas)... It cannot be pleaded that it was unknown that such a condition existed nor is it possible to support the assertion that the traders were confining themselves to a war of extermination against the elephants. Many of the traders are stirring up strife amongst the natives and assisting one tribe against another in order to share the loot.²³⁰

Governor Fredrick Jackson was alarmed at the lack of administrative control by the British in Acholiland and how the Ethiopian ivory traders had exploited this administrative vacuum to indiscriminately hunt elephants for ivory.

²²⁹ Entebbe Achieves, Bell to Sadler, 13/9/1906.

²³⁰ Entebbe Archives, Memo by Jackson Fredrick 19/1911 of 4/7/1911.

Additionally through the same ivory traders, the people of northern Uganda particularly the Acholi, got and accumulated large quantities of arms which their chiefs (rwots) used in inter-clan feuds. Consequently, this made the Acholi a threat to even the British. As Karugire notes,

Hitherto, the British officials had reasoned that the communities of northern Uganda, armed with a few antiquated weapons, could be subdued as and when it became necessary. But the increasing supplies of sophisticated weapons made the occupation of the region urgent since the more the occupation was delayed the more the communities would learn the effective use of those weapons and hence the more difficult they would be to subdue in future.²³¹

The colonial government may not have known the full extent of the tribal fighting and destruction of elephant by Ethiopian hunters in the north, but there was undeniable evidence that all was not well. As early as 1900, Johnstone reported that the destruction of elephants was “shocking”²³². In 1903, T. Grant, an administrative officer, reported that European and Swahili traders were also taking part in local Acholi tribal raids for cattle, goats, women and food-stuff.²³³ In 1906, H. Rayne, a police officer, made a full report of the unlawful activities of the Swahili in the Turkwell region and, in 1908 Lieutenant Fishbourne wrote that the tribes “raid each other all year round. All the country lying west of Lake Rudolf and for some distance south is continuously swept by raiding bands of Abyssinians or Ethiopians.”²³⁴ For long, what took place in the Acholi sub-region did not attract immediate attention of the colonial government partly because of their policy of concentrating their meager

²³¹ S.R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 114.

²³² F.O.C.P 74005, Johnstone H. to Hardinge, 26 March 1900.

²³³ For details see Karamoja Records 1903.

²³⁴ M. Bartlet, *The Kings African Rifles*, 234.

resources on economically viable areas like Buganda and the kingdoms in the south. The other reason for the change in policy was, as Jackson noted, the importance of ivory as a source of trade and revenue in the period before cotton dominated the Uganda economy.²³⁵ The colonial government then viewed the north as a source of revenue from ivory without undertaking the responsibility of administration. This policy was later seen as a failure because the fortunes from the ivory went to individuals and not to the government. As James Barber put it,

The British officials were compelled to pursue an active policy in northern Uganda, not because they thought it or its inhabitants had any intrinsic value in themselves, but because of British strategic and economic interests.²³⁶

The point to emphasize here is that the policy of marginalization of the Acholi that was employed in Uganda by the British is what partly contributed to the current state of this region. The colonial and later post-colonial regimes did not value Acholiland, for it was considered as a land of less economic value compared to, for example, Buganda in the south, and very little infrastructure developments were made in the area in the colonial period. Post colonial regimes after 1962 have done very little to transform the life and social status of the people there. Leaders have, instead, manipulated the Acholi in different ways and at different times for their selfish political motives, leading to the current turbulence. The Acholi became manipulatable, partly because of the unfortunate outcome of their relations with aliens. The foundation of this was

²³⁵ Figures given in the Annual reports show that for 1904-1905 ivory was the largest single export item (£24,331) and in 1905-06 (£24,331); the second largest to goat skins. No indication is given of the districts from which the ivory was obtained but the reaction of local officers indicates the importance of the north.

²³⁶ J. P. Barber, "The Moving Frontier of British Imperialism", 88.

laid by Arab activities in the region. By 1872, Arab slave traders had already created very unstable conditions in Acholi. As Webster & Onyango-Ku-Odongo have noted regarding the consequence of Arabs in Acholi,

In fact there was no group which regarded peaceful relations as normal and fighting as exceptional. Generally, there was a war of each against all. Torn apart by feuds and internal strife, created and encouraged by the Arab traders, the Acholi people could not stand together and face a common enemy.²³⁷

The lasting effect of this early contact with aliens contributed greatly to Acholi response to later aliens and post-independence leaders. The social fabric of society had been torn apart by Arabs and the British found a people not yet congealed as a large political unit beyond clans; which were also in a state of rivalry or feuds. In such a state, the Acholi fell easily prey to colonial and post-colonial politics of divide and rule.

1910 was a turning point in the colonial government's attitude to the north in general. This was the year when British colonial administration was effectively established in northern Uganda. Colonial government reports of 1910 revealed the seriousness of tribal fighting and the failure of the "Uganda" government to control the ivory trade. It also revealed the dangers to British interests both from the Ethiopian ivory hunters and from the tribes. As F.A. Knowles, the Provincial Commissioner of the Northern Province wrote:

The matter (Ethiopian hunters and tribal fights) is of utmost importance as there is little doubt that in the near future a considerable force will be necessary to deal with these natives and ivory hunters. The situation becomes more dangerous

²³⁷ J. B. Webster, & Onyango-Ku-Odong, "The Peopling of Agago", 165.

every day, unless prompt measures are taken to deal with the situation at once.²³⁸

This forced Stanley Tomkins, the acting Governor, to appoint a touring officer for Karamoja and Turkwell, South of 3°N, to control ivory traders and enter relations with the northern tribes, in an endeavour to control the tribes²³⁹.

There were other important developments in the north in 1910. In July, the District Commissioner (D.C) Nimule in Acholiland reported that large quantities of firearms were being smuggled by ivory traders in from Ethiopia via Karamoja.²⁴⁰ He estimated that each year about Rs. 250,000 worth of ivory was being taken into Ethiopia. The firearms that came in return were used both in the destruction of elephants and in tribal raiding. "I found" he reported, "that the whole country was in an extremely lawless state, raiding, looting and killing among the tribes being a very ordinary occurrence".²⁴¹

Another report from Nimule stated: "During one tour in the Central Acholi unadministered area,"

I personally saw 500 firearms . . . a large number of which being Grass rifles... Relying on their rifles, the Acholi war parties numbering sometimes 2000-3000 strong have now created a reign of terror in the country to the east.²⁴²

These arms smuggled into the Acholi sub-region were exchanged for ivory and foodstuff by the Ethiopians. In a divide and rule tactic, these traders would arm one Acholi leader (rwot) against the other, as a way to weaken them and render

²³⁸ Entebbe Archives, Doc. 106/1910, Provincial Commissioner to Governor, 27/3/1911.

²³⁹ Entebbe Archives, 19/1911 Tomkins- S of S 13/3/1911 and Jackson-S of S, 4.7/1911.

²⁴⁰ Memo by District Commissioner, Nimule, 71/1910, C/S/14.7. 1910, Entebbe Archives.

²⁴¹ Tanner's Report, dated 22/12/1910, Entebbe Archives (71/1Q10).

²⁴² Report of the District Commissioner, Nimule No E/A, 106/1910, D. C, Nimule to Provincial Commissioner Hoima, dated 5/2/1911.

them manipulatable. Once the Acholi were weakened, Ethiopian ivory traders then freely hunted down large numbers of elephants without fear of the Acholi.

What the reports of 1910 and 1911 revealed was, not only the seriousness of the tribal fighting, lawlessness and the failure of the British colonial government to control the ivory trade, but also the dangers to British interests both from the Ethiopians and from the tribes. Although still divided in their organization, the tribes could, with their firearms, present a formidable danger to any future administration. While there was no tribal cohesion of any sort among the Acholi and the other people of northern Uganda, it can be said with equal truth that the presence of these undesirable foreigners created a new and unhealthy atmosphere. Before British colonial rule was firmly established, there were tribal wars and wars among clans of the Acholi tribe. Such wars were, however, not so devastating as those which occurred after the foreigners arrived in the area and those in the post-colonial period.

As is evident from the above, British colonialism in Uganda did not value the interest of the local people. Acholiland only became an area of importance much later when British economic interests were under threat from Ethiopians, the French and Belgians.

The first signs of a break in the old policy came in Lango district. Government stations had been established among the Lango at Bululu (1907) and Ibuja (or

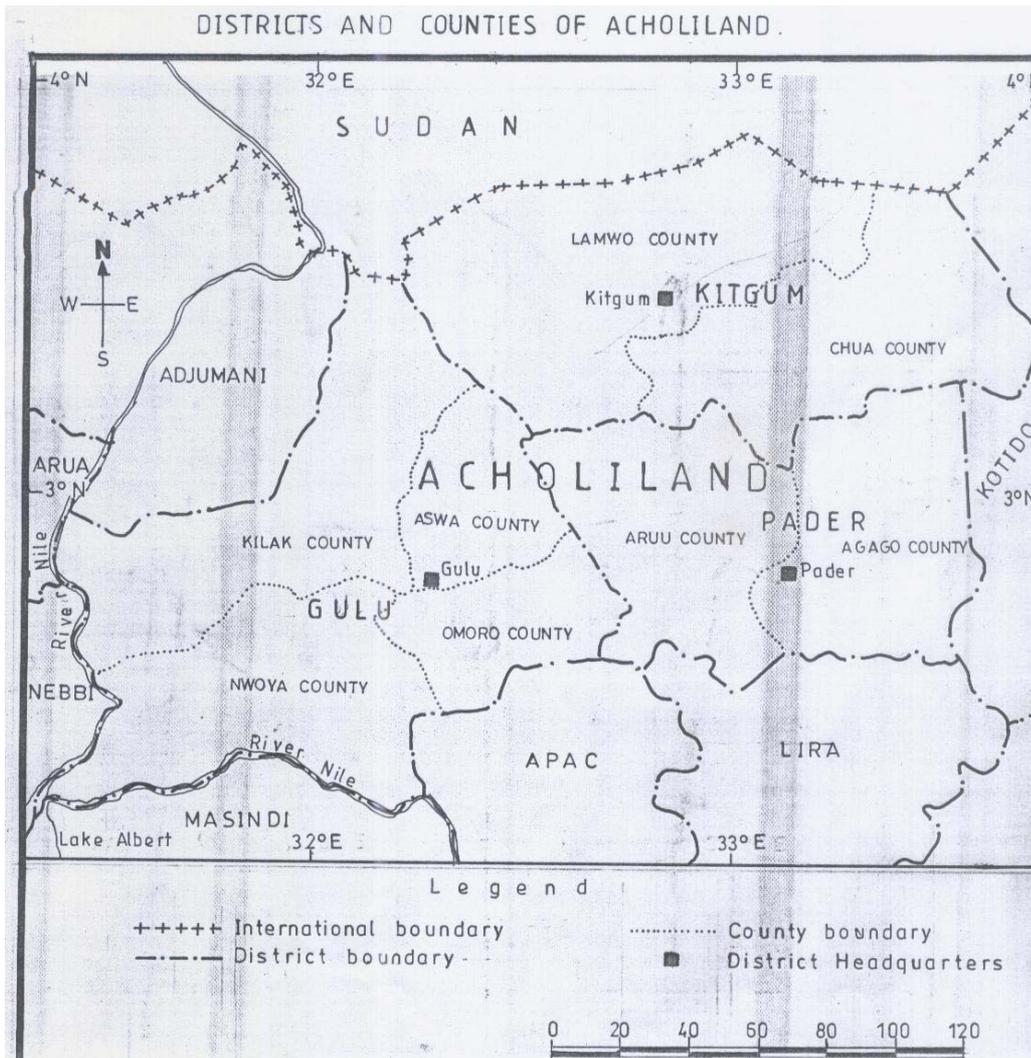
Kibuji) in 1909/1910.²⁴³ In 1910, J.C. Boyle, then acting Governor, reported that information from District officers showed that “the description of the North by Bell as unsuitable for economic development was incorrect”.²⁴⁴

In November 1911, Fredrick Jackson, who was not content to leave the north to military control, extended civil administration eastwards from the Nile to embrace a block of territory bounded by the river Nile, the 4°North and 33° east.

²⁴³ I. Kenneth, “British Administration in Lango District, 1909-1935”, in I. Kenneth, *The Making of Modern Uganda*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958)

²⁴⁴ Letter from Boyle J. C. to Crewe, 4/1/1910, E/A, 50/1006.)

Map showing Districts



Source: A New Macmillan Social Studies Atlas, 1998.

Jackson's extension of administration covered a territorial block and not only a tribal group, although it so happened that the Acholi occupied most of the block. By this measure, the Gulu area of Acholiland was brought under effective British control. The remainder of the Acholi was brought under civil

administration in 1913 when Chua district, with its headquarters at Kitgum, was extended eastwards to the 34° E.²⁴⁵

British Colonialism and Transformations in Acholiland: 1911-1962

By 1902, the British official position about Acholiland had largely changed. Acholiland was, henceforth, recognized as one of the three districts in the Nile Province.²⁴⁶ Even then, it was not until late 1910 that the British established their first administrative center in Acholiland at Gulu.

The period 1910-1920

The first major concern of British administrators in Acholiland was the question of firearms, inter-tribal conflicts and general insecurity in the area. The spread of firearms in Acholiland started in the 1870s during the time of Khedive Ismail Pasha's brief administration of the Equatorial province. After the successful Mahdist nationalists revolt in Sudan against Turko-Egyptian rule, Nubian soldiers who had been used by the Turko Egyptians were left on their own. For survival, most of them began to exchange their firearms with different Acholi rwots (Chiefs). After their final withdrawal from Equatorial Province in 1888, fire arms into Acholi came from Ethiopian ivory traders.

As Karugire notes, "through the ivory traders from Ethiopia, the peoples of northern Uganda were getting and accumulating large quantities of arms and this worried the protectorate administration."²⁴⁷ Through the activities of these

²⁴⁵ E/A 2364, Statement to Provincial Commissioner, 19/4/1913.

²⁴⁶ Official Gazette (Mombasa), June 1, 1902, 200 and August 1902, 256.

²⁴⁷ S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 113.

early traders, Acholi district remained one of the most heavily armed in the protectorate.²⁴⁸ In the 19th century and into the early twentieth century, trade in guns continued between the Acholi and the Alur in the North with Kabarega King of Bunyoro in the South of Lake Kyoga. As British colonial administrator Lord Owen noted, the Acholi and the Alur to the north, provided Omukama (King) Kabarega of Bunyoro with ivory in exchange for guns, and Kabarega was able to sell the ivory to the Arabs at a large profit.²⁴⁹

The first political and military officer in Acholiland (Tufnell) had the dual task of aiding the British military forces and laying the foundation for future civil administration. He had to find porters and food for the military, to make roads, and to persuade outlying tribal groups to concentrate near the roads or military posts so that they could be controlled. He also offered protection against their traditional enemies.²⁵⁰ Tufnell, however, met all the problems foreseen by Hesketh Bell. This included the problem of weak chiefs and tribes with no central organization so that to persuade one village to accept British control peacefully was no guarantee that the next village would not offer resistance. As Tufnell himself contrasted his situation with that in the remainder of the Protectorate, “These tribes”, he wrote, “are not like tribes previously dealt with. In every other part of the Protectorate, it had been found possible to enlarge the sphere of administered area by peaceful methods”.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ R.R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 5.

²⁴⁹ Owen to Colville, March 29, 1894. F.O. 6557/3.

²⁵⁰ J. P. Berber, “The Moving Frontier of British Imperialism”, 36.

²⁵¹ Entebbe Archives, 2364, Tufnell (memo), dated 16/1/1912.

In any case, due to the period of Nubian and Ethiopian incursion into the region and the spread of arms, almost every tribe was armed and hostile to the other and, later, to the British. As Berber (1965) notes, to deal with fierce and often heavily armed northern tribes, Tufnell believed that military force was necessary. Once started, there was no end to the responsibilities, for a tribal group brought under control had to be protected from its neighbours. The only efficient way to do this was to control the neighbours, and so on until the British dominated all.²⁵²

The above situation should not be used to justify the stereotypical position that the Acholi are naturally warlike people but largely portrays the unfortunate results of Acholi interaction with early intruders into their area. The overall consequence was that Acholi socio-political fabric was greatly weakened by infights among the different clans and between the Acholi and other tribes in the north that it was impossible for the Acholi to put up uniform responses to British colonialists. Secondly, this situation of lawlessness and inter-tribal wars was not confined to the Acholi only but held true of the northern tribes in general. As Berber notes, “the civil administrators who followed Tufnell into the Acholi district and parts of northern Uganda encountered similar problems. These problems were not confined to the Acholi”.²⁵³

Dwyer emphasizes that the major task of the officers in the Nile stations between 1908 and 1910 was the registration of guns, with a view to disarming

²⁵² Acholi perception of aliens was, likewise, affected by the effects and activities of early intruders like Nubians and Ethiopians in their area. This partly explains their response to the British later, and other peoples they considered aliens, (for instance the NRA from the south) in their midst.

²⁵³ J. P. Berber, “The Moving Frontier of British Imperialism”, 36.

the Acholi.²⁵⁴ British administrators had to ensure that law and order were maintained and that the petty inter-tribal raids and squabbles of the past were eliminated. The first concern was the level of Acholi armaments. As J. R. Postlethwaite noted in his book *I look Back*, “The district officers who were charged with the responsibility of opening up the Acholi district saw disarmament of the area as their first and most important task”.²⁵⁵

In August-September 1911, a policy of enforcing the firearms ordinance was advanced by the Provincial commissioners of the Nile Province. After signing the Brussels Arms Regulation Treaty of 1890, the British came up with the Firearms Ordinance (1900) to implement the terms of the treaty. This ordinance permitted British colonial administrators to disarm the Acholi to an “acceptable level”.²⁵⁶ Tufnell pleaded that this ordinance should be put into force against the portion of Acholi then under British administration. The seriousness of the process of disarmament illustrates how Acholiland was insecure due to foreign infiltration.

When the colonial administration began registering guns and disarming the Acholi, the chiefs of Gondokoro and Gulu possessed about 1500 rifle²⁵⁷. The 1913 report noted that, in the month of March alone, more than 1400 rifles were collected. Some Acholi leaders resisted this exercise, especially when it was poorly coordinated.

²⁵⁴ J. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism, 104.

²⁵⁵ J. R. P Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 51-52.

²⁵⁶ A. B. Adimola, “The Lamogi Rebellion”, 166-177.

²⁵⁷ Native Report, E/A, 1910 Security report-Northern Garrison, 1910, Entebbe Archives, 110.

The most extensive Acholi resistance occurred in Lamogi in 1911-1912 in opposition to the Government policy of weapon confiscation. In a study of the Lamogi rebellion, A.B Adimola noted two main causes of the revolt. The first, which Adimola deemed the “most important”, was the British demand that all firearms be registered in accordance with the Brussels Treaty of 1890. This treaty of 1890 was a formal agreement between Britain and German to restrict the flow of firearms into parts of Africa. British and German Trading company agents in Africa, especially East Africa, were astounded at the number of firearms they encountered in their travels in the region. The Brussels Treaty of 1890 was meant to bring some control to the situation.²⁵⁸

The second, a “factor of minor importance”, was the forced recruitment of porters and labourers for the roads and rest camps.²⁵⁹ The disarmament of the Acholi, and especially the Lamogi, had serious social and military consequences. Firstly, individual Acholi rwots (chiefs) like Awich of Payira²⁶⁰ tried then to use the colonial army and British power for their own purpose. They denounced their “enemies” to the colonial administration and gave the military cause for punitive measures. They used the foreign military power to settle their own accounts. Those chiefs who acquiesced to the new political realities helped to exacerbate division and manipulative politics that came to characterize British colonial rule in Uganda. After the Lamogi rebellion, only

²⁵⁸ J.O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 146.

²⁵⁹ A.B. Adimola, “The Lamogi Rebellion, 1911- 1912”, 166-177.

²⁶⁰ For more on Rwot Arucha and his unsettled Acholiland, read his biography by Reuben Anywar; an Acholi ethnographer and Historian.

those chiefs appointed by the colonial administration continued to have access to rifles.²⁶¹

This epitomizes British politics of manipulation and divisionism in Acholiland. Chiefs who retained firearms also maintained a monopoly of force, using it for self-aggrandizement and as an instrument of vengeance against old and new rivals. A Divisional chief explained: “you see we must rule by fear”.²⁶² Girling observes that “Government became little more than police”.²⁶³ This illustrates how the major trends that have shaped the development and contributed to Acholiland’s turbulent post colonial experience can be traced back to its history in the colonial period. By weakening the Acholi political system of rwotship, the British laid the foundation for politics of manipulation that post colonial leaders exacerbated.

From the beginning, the colonial administration in Acholiland also failed to create a public space characterized by, at least, the fiction of functionality and neutrality. On the contrary, the colonial state and its representatives in Acholiland appeared to profit from a policy of “eating” and “full-belly”²⁶⁴ that served their own interests, but not those of the majority.

Worse still, by disarming the southern Acholi communities of both registered and unregistered firearms in 1912, the Northern Patrol Officers created a serious imbalance in Acholiland. While those in the south were virtually

²⁶¹ H. Behrend, *Is Alice Lakwena a Witch?* 17.

²⁶² F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 198.

²⁶³ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 199.

²⁶⁴ J. F. Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, (London: New York, Longman, 1989), 16.

disarmed, Acholi in the north remained with both registered and unregistered guns.²⁶⁵ The southern Acholi became easy victims of raids by the north. To-date, insurgency movements against established governments remain pronounced in northern Acholiland than in the south. Districts like Kitgum and Pader in north Acholi have been the major centers of hostilities to the National Resistance Movement government since 1986.²⁶⁶

Moreover, this discriminatory process of disarming increased Acholi suspicion about foreigners and government agents in this area. Such memory and history partly explain why the National Resistance Army instruction in 1986 that Acholi should surrender all guns in their possession was viewed with suspicion. Many Acholi ex-soldiers decided to join the insurgent group in the “bush” for fear of further betrayal.

Against the chiefs (*rwot*) installed by the colonial administration after the Lamogi rebellion in 1912 and who lacked local legitimacy, the Acholi elected their own traditional representatives who they called *rwod* or *Jagi Kwer*, “chief of the hoe”. Like the colonial warrant chiefs, they also maintained an enforcement staff of clerks, messengers and policemen who headed work groups to support each other’s labour in the fields and punished those who did not fulfill their obligations.²⁶⁷ This illustrates how British colonial politics brought confusion that weakened the Acholi political system. In the post-colonial era,

²⁶⁵ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism, 149.

²⁶⁶ This view is held by most military and government officials posted to Northern Uganda. See interview with major Kazini, retired Army Chief on 5th March 2007, interview with current RDC Gulu, Walter Ochora 10th March 2007. Chairman Gulu, Hon. Mao Robert, feels that this explanation is limited in scope.

²⁶⁷ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 93.

such division and weakening of the Acholi local political structures continued under Native Ordinances. To-date, the Acholi cannot easily solve their local grievances using local elders or traditional offices. Issues that have contributed to turbulence in these areas partly relate to their weak political base.

The suppression of the Lamogi rebellion in the early part of 1912 did not signal the final “pacification” of the Acholi people but rather the beginning of effective administration of their district by the British. After the rebellion, the British committed themselves to full administration of the area. This was only possible after the British deployed more administrative staff in the area in the early 1920s.

Transformation of Acholi political structures (1912-1950).

The Uganda protectorate had been built upon the alliance between the British and the Kingdom of Buganda. As the protectorate had expanded, so the Buganda system of government had been spread both by the British and the Baganda agents in what Andrew Roberts called “Buganda sub-imperialism”.²⁶⁸

From the outset, the British were convinced that the “Kiganda” model of local government would be the most viable and probably the cheapest also and that, therefore, this should be “exported” into all parts of the protectorate.²⁶⁹ The Buganda system of Lukiiko (chief’s council) and “civil service” chiefs at county,

²⁶⁸ A. D. Roberts, “The Sub-imperialism of the Baganda”, 435-450.

²⁶⁹ S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 123.

sub-county and parish levels offered a uniform system for the whole protectorate, Acholiland included.

The Buganda system was a completely new political structure for the “stateless societies” of the North. Early European anthropologists,²⁷⁰ just like the British administrators later, failed to appreciate that the so-called pre-colonial “stateless states” like Acholi had a system of government that gave meaning to the collective preservation of law and order, administration and the protection of human rights among their chieftaincies. Non-Bantu speaking people like the Acholi were defined in terms of what political institutions they lacked rather than in terms of how they organized their political life. “The Natives,” wrote Hesketh Bell (in reference to the Acholi),

unlike those of Uganda (Buganda) and Unyoro (Bunyoro), are apparently unwilling to submit to domination by chiefs. There are no powerful local authorities through which we might transmit our directions and every group of families seems to live independently and to be more or less at variance with their neighbours.²⁷¹

This mischaracterization of Acholi communities continued even in the 1930s and 1950s. This became the cornerstone of political changes carried out by the British on Acholi political structure.

Postlethwaite, the pioneer colonial administrator of Acholiland, recalls the effort to include East Acholi into the Protectorate. “I became so discouraged by the absence of any real chiefs with definite, permanent tribal authority that I found

²⁷⁰ For more on this read Lucy Mair, *Primitive Government*, (Baltimore: Penguin, 1962).

²⁷¹ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 199.

my mind turning for salvation to the Old Buganda Agent Policy of Eastern Uganda,” he wrote.²⁷² This illustrates the frustrations of British administrators in their political dealings with the Acholi, compared to the kingdom areas with clear political structures like the office of Kings. In the colonial and also post colonial period, Acholiland was regarded as a home for “war like” and “primitive people”.

Early explorers like Speke and Grant also described Acholi as a primitive people when these two explorers crossed the Nile River and entered Acholiland. Moorehead proposes that “the tribes grew more primitive; they were back in a region of naked, painted men who carried bows and arrow, and who knew nothing of the arts and crafts of Buganda”.²⁷³ The negative characterization of the Acholi by the British formed the basis of their policy of divide and rule where the Acholi and other West Nile tribes were declared labour supplies for the South and for the army and police. The colonial administration effected this in Uganda, especially in southern Uganda, by inculcating in them a sense of racial superiority partly through religion and education at the expense of the Acholi and northerners in general who were regarded as, ‘warlike and primitive people’.

After independence in most African states, as Amii Omara-Otunnu notes, in most fields, power was transferred to Africans who had not been in a position to accrue a record of comparable achievements which would command the respect

²⁷² J. R. P. Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 56.

²⁷³ A. Moorehead, *The White Nile* (London: H. Hamilton, 1960), 68.

of across-section of the population.²⁷⁴ Almost all post-colonial leaders in post-independent Uganda fall into this category. Obote, a Langi from northern Uganda, who ruled Uganda between 1962 and 1971 and 1981 and 1985, did not have a track record in Uganda's pre-independence history that would have swayed the entire population to support him as president. To rule, he resorted to manipulation of the high Acholi population in the post-independence army to overthrow the 1962 government led by Kabaka (king) Mutesa II, a Muganda. He used the Buganda factor to rally support from the north, North East, West Nile and Bunyoro until he was overthrown by Idi Amin, from West Nile. Amin also exploited the hatred of the Baganda towards Obote and his Kakwa-Lugbara-dominated army to rule till 1979.

In the same way, to come to power in 1986, Museveni and his National Resistance Army exploited Buganda's hatred for Obote and his Acholi-dominated army to fight a five-year bush war in Luwero in Buganda against Obote's second regime. After victory in 1986, the Uganda National Liberation Army Acholi soldiers launched war on the NRA of Museveni partly to regain power and also because of the NRA record of revenge against all Acholi for the mistakes of the Acholi UNLA soldiers. This shows how post-colonial leaders in Uganda carried on with "divide and rule politics" of the British. The 20-year conflict in Acholiland partly draws from this negative history. The Africans who succeeded to positions of authority after independence failed to narrow the divide. As a result of the stereotype and politics of marginalisation, British

²⁷⁴ A. Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890-1985*, 8.

administrators started institutional transformation in Acholiland without due regard for consequences on future Acholi political and social life.

As British authority became more firmly established, chiefs who were seen as “unco-operative” or “incompetent” were deposed or replaced by more compliant men known as warrant chiefs. Acholi chiefs who collaborated with the British and those appointed by them became an integral part of the new system of alien rule.

To confirm the above, Bere R.M, the administrative successor to Postlethwaite in Acholiland, notes that the British administration was influential in the election of chiefs who were willing to co-operate with the colonial administration. Consequently, the tendency was for the proportion of government nominees to increase at the cost of patrilineal clan chiefs. “Many of the traditional chiefs were dismissed, retrenched or retired, and others were transferred to fill vacancies caused by these removals. New chiefs were appointed irrespective of clan or family” he writes.²⁷⁵

For instance, new chiefs like rwot Okello-Mwaka were imposed on the Puranga. Rwot Aliket of Payira was given authority over the Labongo clans. In addition, Rwot Atyak was deposed in 1927 “because he failed to carry out government orders” and was replaced by one Atoyo Jakanya from Patiko.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ R. M. Bere, “Land and Chieftainship Among the Acholi”, *Uganda Journal*, 19, 1 (1955), 49-56.

²⁷⁶ S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 125.

Dwyer points out that several local Acholi leaders, as well as ordinary people, resisted what they regarded as the disruption of their indigenous modes of political representation.²⁷⁷ For example, the Labongo clans resisted Rwot Eliya Aliker. Reuben S. Anywar, in his work “Acoli Ki Ker Megi”, observes that the Labongo clan saw the imposition on them of Rwot Eliya Aliker from Payira as Payira paramountcy and resented it.²⁷⁸ Aliker also made demands upon the Labongo to provide labour for the building of roads before he was able to win their confidence. Apart from seeing him as a foreigner, the Labongo people also hated being ruled by force.²⁷⁹ Together with the European District Commissioner of Acholi, M. Wright, they ordered the confiscation of Labongo cattle. A British military officer, Wegstaff, with Payira auxiliaries, attacked, killed and confiscated Labongo cattle.²⁸⁰ In this way, British colonial politics was very instrumental in weakening the Acholi political system and laying ground for the later political events, including conflicts that have bedeviled Acholiland.

Administrative re-arrangements were resisted elsewhere, too, by the Alero who opposed amalgamation with Koic and others, like those eastern Acholi of Paimol area who refused to accept the chiefs appointed over them. The resulting “Paimol rising” of 1918 had to be put down strongly and the leaders died before a firing squad.²⁸¹ The British had deposed Lakidi, the chief of Paimol, on grounds that he was unjust and dishonest. As his replacement, the British had

²⁷⁷ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 103.

²⁷⁸ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 19.

²⁷⁹ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 164.

²⁸⁰ J. O. Dwyer, “The Acholi of Uganda: Adjustment to Imperialism”, 164.

²⁸¹ More on this is detailed in an unpublished paper by Okello James and John Orr Dwyer- “The Paimol rising of 1918”, (1969, Unpublished).

chosen Amet-chief of Lira Amiel, about twenty miles south of Paimol. Amet was a proven leader but, unfortunately, had suffered from leprosy and had lost some of his fingers and toes.²⁸² Besides the issue of leprosy, this resistance was evidence that the people of that area had defied British imposition of Paimol paramountcy over them. Such British actions did not only contribute to loss of lives and property, but they also increased the enmity between the Paimol and the Acholi of Alero. British colonial administrators exploited such differences to consolidate their rule over the Acholi.

In other parts of Acholi, those chiefs who allied with the British were rebuked, derided and threatened with death or even killed by the local people. In Puranga, warrant chief-Okello Mwaka, who was deemed despotic and untraditional, was assassinated. For colonialism to consolidate unchallenged supremacy in the area, the alleged assassins of Okello Mwaka were executed in Gulu by District Commissioner J. Postlethwaite. In his book, *I look Back*, J. Postlethwaite wrote: “Our warrant chief (Okello Mwaka) became very unpopular and was murdered by his enemies”. He continued, “I tried these murderers, sentencing four to a long term of imprisonment and four to death; sentencing duly confirmed and carried out in Gulu one early morning”.²⁸³ Such measures and punishment not only scared those opposed to warrant chiefs, but also deepened division in Acholiland. Chiefs like Olia of Atyak, who had turned to collaboration with the British, happily supported the British action and remarked, “That is the best show you’ve put up since you have been here. That

²⁸² Adimola Andrew in an interview with the author at Gulu Town, February 15, 2007. A Leper was and is still regarded as a social misfit or a curse among the Acholi.

²⁸³ J. R. P. Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 64.

has taught all the Acholi to be government men, and when can we have another?"²⁸⁴

The above action fits within the guiding principle of British divide and rule as summarized by the Provincial Commissioner of Northern Province in 1917 that "...if the villagers are going to resist the authority of the chiefs, every action must be taken and a good lesson given so that others will not follow suit".²⁸⁵

The foregoing analysis of the situation in Acholiland during the early years of British colonialism shows that attempts to establish paramountcy had been bedeviled with tension, wars and death and political authority in the district of Acholi was restructured. The British were, in fact, asking the chiefs to undertake administrative and executive functions for which there was no precedent in their tribal organizations. Some British administrators even became so exasperated that they took unto themselves duties which were normally the responsibility of the chiefs. In 1912, Postlethwaite advocated that, because of the inefficiency and illiteracy of the chiefs, the only successful method of tax collection among the Acholi was direct collection by District officers (DOs).²⁸⁶ The climax of this process was the setting up of Acholi administrative courts, with chiefs appointed by the same colonial authority to preside over cases instead of the old rwots and elders. As Sverker Finnström notes, "In practice as Acholi individuals were assigned to run the courts, some

²⁸⁴ J. R. P. Postlethwaite, *I Look Back*, 64.

²⁸⁵ E.S.A., S.M.P 4513, Correspondence from Eden to D.C., Chua, Jan. 19, 1917.

²⁸⁶ J.P. Barber, "The Moving Frontier", 37.

came to incorporate imperial attitudes which were further disseminated and imposed on the subjects under colonial administration”.²⁸⁷

Around 1950, the anthropologist F. K. Girling attended one of these courts, watching how it meted out beatings, fines and imprisonments. “You see, we must rule by fear,” its divisional chief attested to the anthropologist. As the chief continued to justify his work, his word echoed the colonial image of Africans in general:

The people (Acholi) are lazy; they do not realize what good things the government is doing for them. How can we make Acholi progress unless we grow cotton, pay our taxes and dig latrines as the government wants us to do.²⁸⁸

By a studied refusal to show much comprehension or any respect for the political traditions of the people they were “protecting”, the British were responsible for the inevitable decay of those traditions. This shows how far the colonial administration had promoted polarization among the Acholi. The changes they initiated produced “winners” as well as “losers” and were met with responses ranging from overt resistance, always scattered and localized; and almost always brutally suppressed, to active collaboration. The chiefs who acquiesced to the new political realities were able therein to maintain influential positions. This shows that the Acholi too were attempting to manipulate the colonial situation to maintain influential positions and advantages.

²⁸⁷ F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surrounding*, 68.

²⁸⁸ M. Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*, 159. See also F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 198.

The Acholi case reinforces the argument that just as ethnic codification was a primary means through which the colonial power of indirect rule tried to keep its control, so ethnic belonging was to become one of the main ways of protesting against the very same control. In other words the colonial politics of ethnification was also an avenue of anti-colonialism.²⁸⁹

The early British administrators of Acholiland clearly measured progress by European standards. According to them, there had to be a recognizable chain of command which passed from the European officers through the chiefs to the people. The people, as “beneficiaries” of British programs of protection, roads and station-building, and contact with the outside world would have to pay through respect and, later, taxes.

The British were also not wise enough not to restrict their attention to the recognized “royalty” (in the sense of “hereditary hierarchy”) of Acholiland, but to seek help from enterprising and politically astute Acholi of “non royal” background. The colonial conquest appropriated colonized societies and perhaps, more importantly, the past of these societies. In Acholiland, the result of this was the promotion of division and politics of intrigue. It also largely contributed to Acholi negative memory about foreign rule. In the post-colonial period, the Acholi have struggled to survive in the politics of manipulation, ethnic stereotyping by the different regimes. The current turbulence in this area partly draws from this colonial experience.

²⁸⁹ M. Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*, 223. See also J. Okuku, “Ethnicity, State Power and the Democratization Process in Uganda”, 11.

As shown above, the Acholi became victims of, but also agents in, the formation of Uganda and its ethnic districts. The Acholi, organized “without sultans or kings” of any consequence, as Speke (1863:575) claimed, came to suffer under the racist imperial authority they had to obey.²⁹⁰

Other agents of change in Acholiland

The impact of the second formidable force of change upon Acholiland was of a different sort. This was the force and role of the Christian mission. The representatives of the Christian churches did not make momentous decisions which disturbed the nature of politics in the country, but on a local level, their influence upon individuals was perhaps greater than that of the new government in Acholiland.

Missionaries promoted a tribal consciousness in Acholiland and neighbouring areas primarily by developing written vernacular languages and producing written accounts of local (or tribal) histories and customs²⁹¹. Both Protestant and Catholic Missions played these roles in Acholiland, but the most active were the remarkable Crazzolara and his fellow Verona Fathers. “By a process of selection, emphasis, and distortions,” Girling wrote, “they will write ‘histories’ which fit the needs of the present social order”.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ J. H. Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, 376.

²⁹¹ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 7.

²⁹² F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 203.

Together, missionaries helped create a powerful new idiom and new avenues for the expression of a consciously identified and clearly bounded ethnic (tribal) identity. Comboni missionary collection on the “Old Acholi” or “Acoli Macon” history and cultures became a vital tool used to revive Acholi identity and ethnic consciousness. By the end of the 1960s, Allen notes that this booklet on “The Old Acholi” had been printed in an amazing, 45,000 copies.²⁹³

Moreover, missionaries also produced locally-educated elite who further developed and articulated this identity and propagated it to a much wider audience than the missionaries alone could ever have done. The point being emphasized here is that missionary activity, assisted by the colonial system, was crucial in the creation of new or new kinds of ethnic identity in colonial Uganda. Ethnic and religious boundary drawing went hand in hand in the colonial period. In the later years, missionary competition created new divisions between Catholicism and Anglican Protestantism, although in Acholiland, Catholicism took the dominant position.²⁹⁴ This division was further widened by the different regimes in the post-colonial period. Manipulation of such differences has contributed in one way or the other to the rise of different rebel movements along religious backgrounds.

Meanwhile, to articulate their various interests in the colonial discourse, the colonial subjects were dependent on their ability to read, write and speak

²⁹³ Most collections on Acholi traditions made in the early 1970s were the product of missionaries or Acholi trained by them. Most extensive works on this has been collections by J. P. Crazzolaro, *The Lwoo: Part II and the Lwoo: Part II*, (all by Verona: Museum Combonianum).

²⁹⁴ In the 1991 national census, 70 percent of the population in Acholiland listed themselves as Catholic, 25 percent as protestants and only 0.5 percent as Muslims.

English. Education, which in northern Uganda was for many years monopolized by the missionaries, provided them with this.²⁹⁵ Education was however, double-edged. As Mudoola observes, “colonial education domesticated its subjects, at least in part”.²⁹⁶ The protectorate government did not get involved in the provision of education in this region until later, while the first schools in the south had been operational since 1901. As Karugire rightly notes, the excuse for letting this province lag behind in the extension of social services was always the same; “its stage of development was not yet of the order to make full use of such facilities”.²⁹⁷ Ordinary people in Acholiland took critical notice of this process of domestication.

When missionaries spread education, the few Africans who attained it had to adopt European Christian values as well at the expense of traditional African values. In such a case the “graduates” of this early education were domesticated to support missionaries and later colonialists in their diverse activities. In addition, as Karugire further explains, the introduction of western Education and values also effectively disenfranchised those, who for one reason or another, did not get that Education so that the uneducated populace-something in the region of 80% or so of the population – were largely spectators rather than active participants in the events leading to the granting of independence.²⁹⁸ Education also created a wedge in the political structure, especially in identification of chiefs’. Chiefs who were acknowledged or even put into office by

²⁹⁵ J. Middleton, *Lugbara Religion: Ritual and Authority among an East African People*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 3.

²⁹⁶ D. Mudoola, *Religion, Ethnicity and Politics in Uganda*, 75.

²⁹⁷ S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 140.

²⁹⁸ S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 144.

the colonial administration obtained new denominations in popular talk. Educated chiefs became “chiefs of the pen” (rwodi kalam) which effectively differentiated them from those leaders who were ritually anointed with oil made from the shea-butter tree (rwodi moo). The point being made here is that British colonialism brought about polarization in Acholi political structure. This was the basis for internal division as the people began to regard new educated leaders as stooges of the British up to undermine the local chiefs. The inheritors of the colonial state and the politics played thereafter is what possibly made it worse.

British colonial practices were also powerful instruments in the making of more rigid ethnic boundaries in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa.²⁹⁹ The lines drawn on colonial maps and images in “peoples’ heads” were increasingly operationalized, reinforced and reified. On the basis of perceived common origins, political organization and language, the Acholi were a designated tribe, unique from other tribes and, as such, was administered as a discrete tribal unit.³⁰⁰ In this way, British politics at that time became strictly limited and exclusively tribal. Consequently, at the local level, individuals and social and, later, political groups among the Acholi began to compete for power and influence within the context of their tribe. The Acholi as a collective entity also competed with other tribes for scarce social and economic investments and opportunities. It is this urge that the people in power, especially in the post-colonial period, exploited and manipulated with respect to ethnic groups, like

²⁹⁹ J. Lonsdale, “States and Social Processes in Africa: A Historiographical survey, *African Studies Review*, 24, 2/3 (1994), 139-225. See also T. Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa”, in E. Hobsbawn & T.O. Ranger (Eds.), *The Invention of Ethnicity in Zimbabwe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983)

³⁰⁰ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 7.

the Acholi, leading to deeper ethnic division and conflicts. Politics then emphasized sharp differences and exclusive tribal cultures and identities, exaggerated and even invented differences among the people, laying the ground for conflict. The end result has been politicization of ethnicity in order to satisfy selfish economic and political ends. In this context, the Acholi and their neighbours increasingly saw themselves as different and as distinct from each other.

In other parts of East Africa where this labeling and reifying was not highly politicized, the exercise did not contribute to conflicts. With regard to, for example, the Sukuma, Brandstrom notes that they were labeled and categorised as a bounded and united “tribe” during the colonial years. Like the Acholi, the Sukuma were registered as a distinct tribe in the documents of the colonial administration and a Sukuma Federation of Chiefs came into being”.³⁰¹ While this made the Sukuma think of their own identity against their neighbours, political players in post-independent Tanzania did not manipulate this for selfish ends. Instead, the unitary politics developed and played after independence down-sized such colonial categorization in Tanzania. In Uganda, post-colonial leaders fell prey to this British divisive politics which laid the foundation for and encouraged polarization of ethnic identities rather than trans-ethnic alignments. This can partly be explained by the way Uganda had been divided into the North and South. The immediate post-independent rulers, with little historical records of their own to rally the masses, turned to petty

³⁰¹ P. Brandstrom, *Who is a Sukuma and Who is a Nyamwezi: Ethnic Identity in West- Central Tanzania*, Working Papers in African Studies, 27, (Uppsala: Department of Cultural Anthropology, Uppsala University, 1986).

ethnic differences to win political favours from one or the other of the different ethnic groups leading to division and later conflicts. (A later chapter will explore the role of political leadership and conflict in Uganda).

After World War II, a substantial number of Acholi were or had been members of the colonial army and police forces. Because cotton production, introduced in Acholiland in 1930s, and unskilled migrant labour yielded such low returns, many Acholi with army or police ties attempted to join the growing wartime forces. By the end of World War II, some 5600 Acholi were serving in the army; roughly 20 percent of the male household heads then paying poll tax in the district. Demobilization after the war saw most of these men discharged, though enough Acholi remained to make them the Ugandan tribe with the highest number of soldiers.³⁰² Ali Mazrui, too, emphasizes that, after the KAR, the Acholi remained dominant in post-independence armies. The Acholi constituted the largest single group within the armed forces of Uganda, although they were clearly one of the smaller groups in the total population of Uganda. Between a third and a half of the Uganda army consisted of the Acholi.³⁰³ He adds that “their preponderance was partly due to their categorization as a tribal unit in the colonial period”.³⁰⁴ Mazrui acknowledges the role of the British colonialists, first in creating the Acholi as an ethnic identity and, secondly, in establishing their dominance in the army; hence the ethnification process in the military.

³⁰² R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 7.

³⁰³ A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*, 445.

³⁰⁴ A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*, 445.

In any case, their “superior position” in the army also portrayed them as a cruel people since the colonial army was very repressive. They have since been stereotyped, hated, and isolated by other ethnic groups especially from the south.³⁰⁵ Not only do stereotypes distort history through oversimplification, but they are also extremely dangerous breeding grounds for bigotry, fear, resentment, irrationality, animosity, hatred and ethnic conflict and cleansing. In extreme cases, as Kasozi, Prunier, and M. Mamdani, have noted, stereotypes have culminated in mass violence, the mass displacement of people, ethnic cleansing, pogroms and genocide.³⁰⁶ This, otherwise normal process, became the most important feature of the North-South divide in post-colonial Uganda politics. As Mamdani observes, “Every institution touched by the hand of the colonial state was given a pronounced regional or ethnic character. It became a truism that a soldier must be a northerner, a civil servant, a southerner, and a merchant an Asian”.³⁰⁷

The implication of this institutional “division of labour”, and the organization of power, could only be realized during the post-colonial period with attempts to reform the state. In addition, the assignment to the north, for instance, as a source of soldiers and policemen had negative implications for stability as the ruling elite during the immediate post-colonial period, who were from the north (i.e., Obote, 1962-1971) used this military predominance to acquire and retain

³⁰⁵ Interview with Adimola A. 2007.

³⁰⁶ A. B. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, see also G. Prunier, “Armed Conflict in the Heart of Africa: Sudan’s Regional War”, in *Le monde Diplomatique* (Feb 1997), available online: <mondepliplo.com/1997/02/02sudan>, M. Mamdani, *When Victims become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and Genocide in Rwanda*.

³⁰⁷ M. Mamdani, *Citizens and Subjects: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of late Colonialism*, (Princeton N.J: Princeton University Press.1996), 29.

power undemocratically. Such leaders then resorted to excessive use of the military in trying to solve what were typically political issues.

After Uganda attained political independence in 1962, this ethnic division of labour continued. Under Obote from Lango (1962-1971) and until 1985, almost two-thirds of the army came from the north, especially from Acholi. In this period, not only did the tension between North and South increase, but the politicization of ethnic groups was also exacerbated,³⁰⁸ although or perhaps precisely because, Obote tried to pursue an anti-tribal policy. In combination, with the failure of successive post-colonial leaders to work out generally accepted and institutionalized peaceful means of resolving differences, the result is the current conflict in places like Acholiland. The ethnification and militarization of politics therefore remains an important factor in any explanation of Uganda's post-independent conflicts.

With the dominance of colonial power, a complex process ensued in which ethnicity actualized itself more and more in struggles to participate in central government. In relation to the Europeans who held the central power and to other ethnic groups, the Acholi increasingly objectified their own way of life, expressed in the "invention" of ethnicity, "traditions" of their own, and an ethnic history.

³⁰⁸ H. Holger Bernt, *Ethnicity and Military Rule in Uganda: A Study of Ethnicity as a Political Factor in Uganda, Based on a Discussion of Political Anthropology and the Application of its Results*. Research Paper, 43, (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1977)

British colonialism, therefore, remains very instrumental in the construction of Acholi ethnic identity. Having brought the different Acholi chiefdoms together, and later congealed them in a single district, the British then gave the Acholi occupational identity in the army and as labourers in plantations in the south. Due to the fact that the colonial army was repressive, just like the first post-colonial armies, the Acholi, who largely constituted it, were perceived as repressive. Beyond this, the colonial army, like the later post-colonial armies of Obote (1962-1971) and Amin (1971-1979), was regarded as the “home for illiterates”. The Acholi were then stereotyped as “illiterates and social-outcasts” in Uganda.³⁰⁹ Stereotypes always have simplicity largely because they provide simple and deceptive explanations of complex situations and historical realities. This trend became a dangerous phenomenon in Uganda’s politics and partly explains the current conflicts in Acholiland.

In 1944, the Acholi Association was founded as a sports and cultural club. With this, Behrend tells us, the Acholi congealed not only as an administrative, but also as a cultural unit. Lectures on Acholi music and language reinforced and spread the idea of a common Acholi identity. In 1948, the Acholi developed the idea of having a paramount chief for the entire Acholi District who would preside over the, until then, smaller chiefs (rwots); and in 1950 a faction attempted to follow the model of the King of Buganda and establish a king of Acholi “to restore our beloved King Awich”.³¹⁰ The idea of a paramount Acholi leader was promoted and several terms were suggested for the position, notably

³⁰⁹ A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*, 49.

³¹⁰ This development led to a new struggle over the paramount status between the Payira and Padibe.

rwot Acholi (Chief or king of the Acholi) lawir rwodi (the head of “the chiefs”), rwot madit (the big chief) and Laloyo maber (the winner is good).³¹¹ At the climax of this quest for change, however, a struggle over the paramount status erupted between the Payira and Padibe. This shows how disruptive British colonial arrangement had been on the development of Acholi political system. Besides, this innovation as well reflects on the nature of ethnic consciousness then developing in Acholiland. It was a move towards self-determination in the independence process. Ethnicity in Acholiland was crystallizing amidst political frustrations and divide-and-rule politics played by the British.

Emerging party politics on the eve of independence added to the struggle. As noted by Gertzel, “Party leaders established their legitimacy at the district level largely by usurping the role of the chiefs as the recognized spokesmen of the local people”.³¹² When Uganda’s largest political party; the Uganda National Congress (UNC), with Milton Obote as its national leader, committed itself to Payira’s claim to Acholi paramountcy the divide widened.³¹³

What this illustrates is that Acholi ethnic identity developed fast during the period of British colonialism and mounting frustrations. Acholi identity was then forming in competition with other ethnic groups. This set the precedent of continued Acholi unity against the other groups they considered negatively. Such polarization was widened in the post-colonial period.

³¹¹ F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surrounding*, 70.

³¹² C. Gertzel, *Party and Locality in Northern Uganda*, 77.

³¹³ Around the time of independence, Uganda National Congress (UNC) was renamed Uganda People’s Congress (UPC).

The Acholi community under British colonial rule also had inner contradictions. As Acholi identity was forming in competition with other ethnic groups, the internal opposition between rich and poor, aristocrats and commoners, elders and the young, as well as between women and men was increasing. According to Behrend, such internal contradictions were partly the result of the demise of Acholi traditional setting during the period of Turko-Egyptians control. There was no respect for any kind of leadership and elders. Rich Acholi wanted to dominate the poor ones, thereby creating a kind of internal division. An increasing social and economic inequality was also emerging between East and West Acholi. While Gulu District in the west developed more rapidly due to its proximity to the center and its greater fertility, the Kitgum District in the East remained peripheral, serving more as a reservoir for recruiting labour, soldiers for the kings African Rifles and the police.³¹⁴ Rudimentary formal education became the criterion for a military career.³¹⁵

This division within Acholiland has a lot to do with the current turbulence. Kitgum and Pader that fall within the poor eastern section have remained the base for different insurgent groups after the Acholi lost political power and monopoly in the military to the National Resistance Army of Yoweri Museveni in 1986.

British colonial rule in Uganda promoted inequality in development among the different ethnic groups. This was mirrored within the Acholi District. While the

³¹⁴ H. Behrend, *Is Alice Lakwena a Witch?*, 18.

³¹⁵ A. Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and Military in Uganda, 1890-1985*, 44.

colonial administration recruited the bureaucratic elite from the south, especially from Buganda, the north of Uganda was used as a reservoir of labour. This ethnic division of labour contributed substantially to the opposition between north and south and between the Nilotes and Bantu that became so significant in Uganda's history.³¹⁶ This opposition which was "invented" in the scholarly discourse of linguists, anthropologists and historians founded renewed actualization in the history of conflict in Acholiland.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the most important political and administrative unit the British created and respected was the Acholi District Council. The intention of the British was that through such Councils, the Acholi would relate with other people more easily and positively, and it would be easier to administer them. As R.M Bere the District Commissioner stated in 1947:

The urgent trend of modern administration has been to bring the clans together to make the Acholi conscious of their unity as a single people without their individualistic background. To this end the districts of Gulu and Chua were amalgamated in 1937, when a unified district was formed; at the same time the Acholi Council with sects not only for chiefs but for representatives of the people from all parts of the country was brought into being.³¹⁷

Whereas the intention of the British was clearly positive and designed to promote the unity of Acholi and positive relations with other people, in later years, parochial ethnic nationalism developed. In one of its resolutions, the Council suggested that "the bus routes then in the hands of an Indian firm should be given to an Acholi company".³¹⁸ The feeling then was that Indian

³¹⁶ S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 21.

³¹⁷ R. M. Bere, "An Outline of Acholi History", 8.

³¹⁸ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 201.

control of such routes did not benefit the Acholi. The expectation was that once the Acholi took direct control of wealth generating projects, this would help alleviate their poor economic plight and enable them to compete with the south. They also came up with several suggestions and resolutions to protect their identity and interests as Acholi. For example, they requested that the “present structure of the Native Authority should be changed so that instead of all the county chiefs being responsible individually to the District Commissioner, there should be a Lawi Rwot (Head chief/rwot) who should be responsible for them all”.³¹⁹

The trend that developed was that the Acholi Council increasingly became a mouth piece for Acholi protest and unity against other non-Acholi groups. In the 1950s when political party activities began, it even acted as an ethnic institution to campaign for Acholi privileges and resources vis-à-vis those of others in the protectorate. The point is that the politicization of ethnicity, which has a lot to do with the current conflict situation in Uganda and in Acholi in particular, was the outcome of British policies and administrative arrangements. Post-colonial leaders later magnified and militarized it with major-negative results.

In their territorial re-arrangement, the British had also separated the Acholi from their neighbours using rigid ethnic boundaries. What became Acholi District was demarcated and surveyed by the British. As Girling F.K. writes:

³¹⁹ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 201.

The whole of Acholiland, to a greater or lesser degree now forms one large group of persons, united by bonds, which are a combination of kinship, territorial political relationship and ritual; as well as by bonds of common subjection to alien rulers, and of territorial and secular relationships.³²⁰

As Acholi District developed, others like Madi, Teso, and Alur were also promoted. No interaction across districts was encouraged by the British. Worse still, even pre-colonial trade in ivory and cattle, bark-cloth from Buganda, and hoes was not encouraged by British colonialism. According to G. N. Uzoigwe, Commerce across ethnic groups had encouraged a good deal of co-operation between the northern communities and Bunyoro. Such co-operation was both of an economic and military nature”³²¹.

The point is that British administrative economic re-arrangements and reforms deepened ethnic cleavages. The problem with the reforms and the political organizations that emerged after independence was that they did not transcend the limitations of the colonial political economy and politics, particularly ethnicity and regionalism. Therefore, even when the colonial period contributed to the present trouble in Acholiland, much of the blame lies with the post-colonial leadership in Uganda and their failure to learn from History.

PRE-INDEPENDENCE POLITICS IN ACHOLILAND (1950-1962)

By the late 1950s, as Uganda moved towards independence, many of the contradictions of colonial rule became obvious. The late 1940s and 1950s saw a number of political and economic reforms as a result of the anti-colonial

³²⁰ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 116.

³²¹ G. N. Uzoigwe, “Inter-Ethnic Co-operation”, in S. Osoba & I. Obaro (Eds.), *Tarikh; The Peoples of Uganda in the 19th Century*, 3, 2 (Great Britain: Longman, Whitstable Litho Ltd, 1967), 69-77.

movement. Reforms allowed for enhanced rights of association, permitted the formation of co-operatives and trade unions, and witnessed the removal of some racial restrictions on trade and employment. It was also the eve of the establishment of political parties.³²²

The first Ugandan political party, the Uganda National Congress (UNC), founded in 1952-1953 was predominantly Protestant and Buganda. The next major political development was the formation of the Democratic Party in 1956 to advance the interests of Catholics in the administration of Buganda Kingdom.³²³ The rise of these political parties and their competition for power, when it eventually came, widened cleavages in Acholiland.

The first constituency of the Uganda Peoples Congress under Obote from Lango was the non-Bantu speaking north. Support in this region was often expressed in ethnic terms in the sense that while Obote was very popular among his Langi tribe, he was not initially heralded among the Acholi. Even then, the identity Obote used most was the large northern region composed of the Lwo mainly rather than his Langi tribe. Obote was from the Luo-speaking Lango ethnic group.³²⁴ According to Colin Leys, when the Uganda National Congress (UNC) was formed, it was seen by its activists in Acholi as the beginning of an independence movement at a time when many Acholi were serving in the Kings

³²² J. Oloka-Onyango, "New Wine or New Bottles: Movement Politics and One-partyism in Uganda", in J. Mugaju and J. Oloka-Onyango (Eds.), *No Party Democracy in Uganda: Myths and Realities*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2000), 174.

³²³ J. Okuku, "Ethnicity, State Power and the Democratization Process in Uganda", 10

³²⁴ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 7-8.

African Rifles in the operation against the Mau-Mau in Kenya.³²⁵ The formation in the district of the Democratic Party, which quickly became strong in Acholiland after 1956, was looked upon by the UNC militants as an attempt by the missionaries, abetted by the colonial administration, to create a “moderate” organization subject to their influence, which would draw support away from the UNC.³²⁶

The point being emphasised here is the new dimension and divisive politics that this new political dispensation brought into Acholiland. The most notable result, as Colin Leys notes, is that “There is no doubt that hostility between the parties, exacerbated by the monopoly of patronage and influence of the victorious party, runs very deep in the Acholi countryside and it is sharpened by the aggressive and bitter political “style” which the Acholi cultivate”.³²⁷

In other words, political party competition exacerbated Acholi traditions of clan and chiefdom competition. The UNC (later Uganda Peoples Congress) resorted to supporting divisive events and manipulating local politics to secure votes. For instance, as Gertzel noted, “Party leaders established their legitimacy at the district level largely by usurping the role of the chiefs as the recognized spokesmen of the local people”.³²⁸ The UNC intervened further to support Payira’s claim to Acholi Paramountcy against the wishes of the Padibe. Such

³²⁵ C. Leys, *Politicians and Policies: An Essay on Politics in Acholi, Uganda*, 17.

³²⁶ Although the provincial administration had no reason to favour Catholicism, there is evidence that its officers shared the Catholic fear of the supposed communist tendencies of the UNC and regarded with sympathy many of the nice, sensible and reliable men, many of them school teachers, who were drawn to the DP by their religious affiliation.

³²⁷ C. Leys, *Politicians and Policies: An Essay on Politics in Acholi, Uganda*, 17.

³²⁸ C. Gertzel, *Party and Locality in Northern Uganda*, 77.

manipulation of the Acholi as an ethnic group continued well into the period after independence using the army.

As Atkinson ably puts it, “as the army grew larger and more powerful, receiving ever greater shares of the national budget, the officer ranks were transformed from a small number of mostly Europeans, Baganda and other southern Ugandans to a much larger group increasingly from the north of the country. The majority from the north still came from Acholiland”.³²⁹

Under Obote (1962 to 1971), as will be shown later, a process set in that would prove extremely significant for the later history of Uganda in general and Acholiland in particular, namely, the militarization of politics. Nevertheless, already under Obote, the military became an instrument of domestic politics leading to conflicts.

This chapter has contended that, in their administrative reforms in Acholiland, the British had helped to create a united Acholi people and district out of several independent clans. Having done this, however, British colonialism then superimposed a new political and social order and consciousness that lay the foundation for the current turbulence in this sub-region. First, by destroying the traditional political set-up of the Acholi, the British ushered this area and its people into a new phase of confusion. Through their policy of divide and rule, they weakened the rwotship system, and created new rwots and a sense of

³²⁹ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 9.

centralization of power among a people who had for long established their own democratic order of work.

Within the Uganda protectorate, the Acholi were marginalized and given peripheral duties as labourers or recruits in the colonial army. This hardened Acholi ethnic consciousness and beliefs that there were secondary citizens. As Atkinson has stated elsewhere, “Ethnic groups and ethnic identity, then, are not a necessary or natural outcome of cultural beliefs and practices, but a creation of politics and ideology”.³³⁰ British politics/policies in Uganda in the colonial period and those pursued by the post-colonial regimes in Uganda since 1962 had a lot to do with the current state of conflicts in Acholiland. The next chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of the post-independence era.

³³⁰ R. R. Atkinson, *The Roots of Ethnicity*, 9.

**POST INDEPENDENCE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND
CONFLICT IN UGANDA, 1962-2006**

Africa has remained underdeveloped because political leaders on the continent are confused and keep meandering. The continent has plenty of endowments but the leaders lack clear vision to identify the problems of the society to frame proper intervention for continued progress (Says Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda).³³¹

This chapter will analyse the role of independent political leadership in the ensuing conflict since 1962.

Introduction

Uganda became independent from British colonial rule on 9th October 1962. However, unlike other African states like Tanzania, Kenya, Egypt and Senegal where independence was followed by relative political stability, Uganda has experienced extended periods of violent internal strife resulting in massive destruction of life and property. Apart from the period from 1962 to 1964 when the country enjoyed relative peace and stability,³³² Uganda is an example of a post-colonial society that has been riddled with internal conflicts; one which is comparable to the experiences of states like Sudan, Chad, and Democratic Republic of Congo.

During the past forty-five years of independence, Uganda has had nine national presidents and governments. The first government under Sir Edward Mutesa II ended in 1966 when Apollo Milton Obote (then Prime Minister), assisted by the

³³¹ *The Daily Monitor*, March 12, 2009.

³³² *The Daily Monitor*, March 12, 2009.

army, overthrew the 1962 independence Constitutional arrangements and introduced the 1967 Republican Constitution. By this manouvre, Obote had overthrown Mutesa II in a 'palace coup', as the two leaders had initially been part of an alliance (Kabaka Yekka and Uganda People's Congress). Obote was later overthrown by General Idi Amin on the 25th of January 1971.

Idi Amin ruled Uganda with an 'iron hand' until a combined force of Tanzania and Uganda exiles forced him out in 1979. In the five years after Idi Amin's fall, Uganda was ruled by Yusuf Lule for sixty-eight days, Godfrey Binaisa, Paul Muwanga, who rigged the 1980 elections that ushered in Milton Obote's second rule, and General Tito-Okello, a one time army commander under Obote who later overthrew his boss. Okello was subsequently forced out of power by the National Resistance Army led by Yoweri Museveni in 1986. All these changes in government and leadership involved unconstitutional means and wars, reflecting the crisis of governance that has dogged post-colonial Uganda. From 1964, therefore, the political situation has been so volatile that Uganda has become almost synonymous with political disorder, social chaos and conflict. It is this apparent tragic paradox that this work attempts to explain.

Ali Mazrui³³³ and Nelson Kasfir have explained the political upheavals in Uganda since independence as a result of ethnic tension and ethnic diversities. Other scholars like Tarsis Kabwegyere, Lwanga-Lunyiigo³³⁴ and others contend that post-independence instability and conflicts in Uganda are a legacy of

³³³ A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*, and N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 60.

³³⁴ T. Kabwegyere, *The Politics of State Formation*, 67-83. See also S. Lwanga-Lunyiigo, "The Colonial roots of Internal Conflict", 24 -41.

British colonialism and particularly the effects of British colonial policy of divide and rule.

While these views are persuasive, this study contends that conflicts in post-independent Uganda are essentially political in nature and have their origin in how politics has been organized in the post-colonial period. Given, that politics is usually organized around institutions, any proper understanding of conflicts in Uganda must take into account the role of leadership, especially the presidency and the personalities of those who have governed Uganda since independence and how they have managed or mismanaged its institutions, leading to conflict.

Conceptual Framework

‘Conflict’ has been defined differently depending on the context in which the term is used. K.J. Holsti defines “conflict” as the contentions or disagreements that arise between interested parties in a given issue or activity. Considering that parties would always seek to achieve certain goals by defending particular positions in a given issue or activity, their demands and action would run counter to the interests and objectives of other parties.³³⁵

According to Coser, conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources whose main aim is to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals.³³⁶ While the above definitions are useful, they only regard conflicts as

³³⁵ K. J. Holsti, *International Politics; A Framework for Analysis* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1972), 447.

³³⁶ A. Coser, *The Function of Social Concept*, (New York: Free Press, 1956), 8.

negative phenomena that are completely disruptive and dislocating. This study contends that conflicts can also lead to a better understanding of one or both parties in the conflict. This study argues that most of the conflicts in Africa (Uganda inclusive) have been by-products of political activities orchestrated by political leadership.

Leadership

'Leadership' is defined differently by different scholars. Foster Byarugaba defines leadership as the interpersonal influence exercised in a situation and directed through the communication process aimed at the attainment of a specific goal or goals.³³⁷ Put briefly, to lead is to influence people so that they can accept the ideas of the leader. Such influence can be positive or negative, depending on the personality and capability of any given leader. The influence of most post-colonial leaders in Uganda has been negative and divisive, leading to the unending conflicts the country has experienced.

Ochieng-Odhiambo gives us, perhaps, a more comprehensive but precise definition. He defines leadership as an organizing element for the survival of any human community. Odhiambo's contention is that the existence of a society is immediately in jeopardy if there is no qualitative leadership.³³⁸ Indeed, the lack of qualitative leadership appears to be the main problem faced by Uganda since independence 1962.

³³⁷ F. Byarugaba, "Trends in the National Resistance Movement Leadership: Basis for Domestic, Regional and Global Relations", in Kabweru Mukwaya (Ed.), *Uganda, Riding the Political Tiger: Security and War in the Great Lakes Region*, (Kampala: Makerere University Printery, 2004).

³³⁸ Ochieng-Odhiambo, "The Crisis of Leadership in Africa", *CODESRIA*, 3, 1995.

The current perception of leadership in Uganda, as elsewhere in Africa, is that most African leaders have not lived up to the task of developing their areas and enforcing meaningful unity necessary for development. Instead, they have contributed to ethnic division, conflicts and economic malaise. As A. G. A. Bello correctly pointed out, most African political leaders are dictatorial, despotic, autocratic, intolerant and repressive. They do not brook any opposition from any quarters whatever and will use any means, fair or foul, to keep themselves in power even when their actions negate the yearnings and aspirations of the people.³³⁹

This is precisely how post-colonial Ugandan leaders have conducted themselves. Uganda's political leaders have, since independence, failed to build a consensus on which political institutions can be built to resolve political conflicts, short of physical force³⁴⁰. Such force, however, is not a state monopoly entirely, but a means by which political groups seek to establish their hegemony over other competing political groups. This implies that when a group is denied access to political and economic resources, it resorts to military options, leading to upheavals and conflicts that have come to define the Ugandan state.

Leadership should be the logical outgrowth of the existence of a society of individuals and their interests. In Africa, however, the violence is traceable to defective political leadership. Citizens are victims of defective leadership, instead, especially given the reality of the state or leadership having secured

³³⁹ A. G. Bello, "On the Concept of Rationality and Legitimacy of the Constitution", in Olusegun Oladipo (Ed.), *Third Way in African philosophy: Essays in Honour of Kwasi Wiredu* (Ibadan, Hope publishers, 2004), 241.

³⁴⁰ D. Mudoola, *Religion, Ethnicity and Politics in Uganda*, 20.

power and authority through the use of force.³⁴¹ This analysis fits very well within the Ugandan political experience after independence. This study contends that the trouble with Uganda is not its diverse ethnic nature but clearly a failure of leadership. The leaders who governed Uganda from independence have played a vital role in determining whether or not the inherited ethnic diversities could be united in order to create social peace. In Uganda, this factor explains the unremitting and politically motivated violence since 1964.

As Mudoola notes, “Ugandan political and military elites have, over time, worked out political formulae not as a means through which conflicts can be resolved for the ultimate good of the political system as in developed countries, but as tactical weapons for taking care of interests articulated by the political elites; interests peculiar to themselves or the social forces they purport to represent”³⁴². Such formulae range from abusing constitutional processes, involving the army in politics to solve political differences, and manipulating ethnicity. They would adhere to such formulae as long as their interests are served. If they felt that they were still disadvantaged and were strong enough to operate outside the prevailing political formulae they would do so. In this way they created situations that culminated in indifference and, later, open and violent conflict.

³⁴¹ D. Nkurunziza and L. Mugumya (Eds.), *Towards a Culture of Peace and Non-Violent Action in Uganda*, 2, (2000), 71.

³⁴² D. Mudoola, *Religion, Ethnicity and Politics in Uganda*, 20.

POST-INDEPENDENCE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND CONFLICT

At independence in 1962, the new Ugandan state was in a fairly good position to give its citizens more than the two years of relative peace and stability it enjoyed between 1962 and 1964. A resource-rich country, colonial Uganda had long been paying the costs of its administration and, by 1916, was no longer a burden to the British taxpayer.³⁴³ Between 1945 and 1960, Uganda peasants paid over £118 million to the administration and development of their country. After independence, unlike Kenya, Uganda attracted no substantial foreign investment or “aid” and, unlike other dependent ex-colonies, Uganda’s subsistence sector was not only self-supporting but very strong.³⁴⁴ Overall, the new Uganda state was in a fairly good economic position to sustain a strong political environment. Instead between 1964 and 2006, Ugandans were exposed to a high level of violence that far exceeds that of any other people in eastern Africa³⁴⁵. This failure can be attributed largely to Uganda’s leadership.

As Mudoola argues,

the period between 1962 and May 1966 was one of relative peace, not necessarily because the leaders were committed to the politics of reconciliation and peaceful resolution of political differences but simply because some of the leaders and the forces they represented then did not feel strong enough to question the independence constitutional arrangements.³⁴⁶

This implies that, once any of Uganda’s immediate post-independent leaders found himself and the party he represented strong enough to initiate unconstitutional or constitutional changes of interest to him and his party, he

³⁴³ C. C. Wrigley, *Crops and Wealth in Uganda: An Agrarian History*, (East Africa: Indres, 17, 1959), 40.

³⁴⁴ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origin of Violence in Uganda*, 3.

³⁴⁵ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origin of Violence in Uganda*, 4.

³⁴⁶ D. Mudoola, *Religion, Ethnicity and Politics in Uganda*, 20.

would do so. In this way, Ugandan leaders laid ground for differences and later instability. This tendency is documented below.

Obote Apollo Milton & Edward Mutesa II's period (1962-1971)

Uganda was granted independence in 1962 with Apollo Milton Obote, leader of Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC), as executive Prime Minister, supported temporarily by the powerful Kabaka of Buganda and his Kabaka Yekka (KY) Party. The Kabaka became the president the following year.³⁴⁷ The position of a powerful kingdom of Buganda within Uganda, with the Kabaka as president without real political powers, remained a source of controversy and instability.³⁴⁸ The constitutional arrangement then was such that Buganda and other kingdom areas of Ankole, Toro, Bunyoro and the district of Busoga would remain federal states within Uganda. Obote respected this arrangement for as long as it served the faction that he represented (i.e. UPC) and as long as he calculated that he and his UPC were not yet strong enough to initiate changes.

Apollo Milton Obote's leadership, first as Prime Minister and later as a president (1966-1971), was characterized by ethnic and constitutional manipulation largely against Buganda. The first issue used was the "Lost Counties", i. e. counties of Bunyoro like Bugangazi and Buyaga which the British had given to Buganda as pay-back for Buganda's assistance in conquering Bunyoro under Kabalega in the 1890s. There were other boundary disputes between Bukedi and Bugisu in the East of Uganda, the Bamba and Bakonjo rebellion against the

³⁴⁷ H. Kyemba, *A State of Blood*, 22.

³⁴⁸ A. Gakwandi, *Uganda Pocket Facts*, 22.

rule of the Batoro.³⁴⁹ Such conflicts and especially the issue of lost counties of Bunyoro was what Obote used to isolate Buganda. When President Mutesa II protested about the return of the “lost counties” to Bunyoro, Obote adhered to the constitution of 1962. The 1962 Constitution clearly stated that, in case of boundary conflict or people who wanted to secede, a referendum would be conducted.³⁵⁰ In any difference then where the constitution worked in his favour, Obote would always refer the Kabaka to the sanctity of the Constitution of 1962.

The Obote-Mutesa showdown ended with the break-up of the UPC-KY alliance that had enabled Obote (a Langi) to associate with Federal Buganda and be granted political power by the British as Executive Prime Minister in 1962. By then, he had already sown seeds of hatred against Buganda within other ethnic groups, especially Bunyoro, and other kingdom areas that were initially opposed to the presidency of Mutesa II.³⁵¹ On the issue of “lost counties”, political actors from outside Buganda believed a historic wrong had been set “right”.³⁵² This made parliamentarians from outside Buganda and especially Banyoro to support Obote. He also benefited by cross-overs of 14 Parliamentarians from Kabaka Yekka and Democratic Party to Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) by the end of 1964, thus gaining the much needed two-thirds majority for his Party in the National Assembly.³⁵³ With this majority, Obote officially ended the KY-UPC

³⁴⁹ S. R. Karugire, *Roots of Political Instability in Uganda*, 45.

³⁵⁰ S. R. Karugire, *Roots of Political Instability in Uganda*, 45.

³⁵¹ D. Mudoola, *Religion, Ethnicity and Politics in Uganda*, 95.

³⁵² S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 45.

³⁵³ E. Masinde Aseka, *Transformational Leadership in East Africa*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2005), 313.

alliance and continued to rule Uganda under his majority party (UPC). This marked the beginning of political and later conflictual problems in Uganda.

Obote's leadership is also held responsible for the involvement of the military in politics and in settling what appeared to be political matters using the military (i.e. militarization of politics). As Uganda's first post-colonial leader, Obote set the standard that subsequent leaders after him tended to follow. Several cases illustrate this.

In 1964, all the three East African countries (Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania) experienced army mutinies. There were mutinies in the Colito Barracks in Dar-es-Salam, Lanet Barracks near Nakuru, Kenya and Jinja Barracks near Jinja in Uganda. This was an indication of serious social and transitional problems in the management of inherited bureaucracies, including the military. The three East African leaders handled these events differently and hence experienced different histories in civil-military relations in the subsequent years. While Nyerere and Tanzania called in the assistance of British Marines to crush the mutiny, in Kenya, Kenyatta took it as a lesson on the dangers of coups and took steps to keep the army out of politics. Kenyatta resorted to carrying out ethnic balancing in the army to neutralize it politically.³⁵⁴

In Uganda, Obote took care to nurse the military as a power base outside the traditional ethnic constituencies. First, he gave in to the demands of soldiers, hence creating a tradition of "demands" by soldiers. Secondly, no effort was

³⁵⁴ E. Masinde-Aseka, *Transformational Leadership in East Africa*, 239.

ever made to rebuild the army as a national institution after the mutiny. The military, largely from the North was left intact as it had been before the mutiny on the grounds of what Mudoola calls the doctrine of Ethno-functionalism,³⁵⁵ which was vividly illustrated by Felix Onama, then Minister of Defence:

Thousands of Northerners (notably Acholi and Langi) died in the two World Wars to defend Uganda against Nazism and Fascism and if the young generation or their children who have grown up in the North would like to follow in the footsteps of their fathers, nobody is going to stop me from recruiting them into the army.³⁵⁶

Instead there was a general purge of army officer corps in which Bantu officers were the victims. Among these officers were Major Katabarwa, Major Kisira, and Captain Irima.³⁵⁷ Obote's tribesmen, the Acholi and Langi, then came to dominate the rank and file of the army. This process of ethnification of the military has dogged Uganda since then and partly accounts for the conflicts after independence.

In the struggle for political power, therefore, the political leaders and other ethnic group actors then made maximum use of the resources available to them. With such an ethnic based army, the Obote regime was then prepared for a 'show-down' with Buganda. This tradition of using the national army as a force to protect the interest of political leaders has since remained a feature of Ugandan politics. Every leader has to ensure that the army is largely constituted of members of his ethnic group. During Idi Amin's rule (1971-1979) West Nilers, mostly Kakwa and Lugbara dominated the then Uganda Army

³⁵⁵ D. Mudoola, "Communal Conflict in the Military and its Political Consequences" 116-138.

³⁵⁶ See *Uganda Parliamentary Debates*, 3, 3205.

³⁵⁷ D. Mudoola, *Religion, Ethnicity and Politics in Uganda*, 96.

(Amin was a Kakwa). The National Resistance Army of Yoweri Museveni (1986-to-date) is largely dominated by Banyankole and Bahima. Of the five Generals, all are Banyankole. Museveni is a Munyankole of Hima stock.

This clearly supports this study's earlier contention that conflicts in Uganda are largely political rather than ethnic. Ethnicity is only used as a factor of support by one group against the other, hence its politicization. Secondly, Obote's manipulation of the National Assembly, National Constitution and the army still lends credence to the argument that post-independence Ugandan leadership failed to work out a basic political consensus on the basis of which political institutions can be built to resolve political conflict; short of physical force. Post independence political leaders adopt political formulae as tactical weapons for taking care of their own interests and that of the group they purportedly represent at the expense of others. This leads to conflict.

1966 remains a turning point in the political History of Uganda. On February 4, 1966, at about 2 O'clock, when Parliament was due to convene, Parliament Building was, for the first time in Uganda's history, surrounded by heavily armed troops purportedly on the orders of the Army Commander, Milton Obote. An opposition motion denouncing Prime Minister Obote as corrupt and accusing him of plotting to overthrow his own government under the Presidency of Kabaka Mutesa II was due to be tabled.³⁵⁸ Obote was also accused of filling the Uganda army with Acholi and Langi and of training a personal army³⁵⁹. Daudi

³⁵⁸ E. Masinde-Aseka, *Transformational Leadership in East Africa*, 314.

³⁵⁹ A. Gakwandi, *Uganda Pocket Facts*, 23.

Ochieng, an opposition member of Parliament, then demanded Obote's resignation and called on UPC to appoint a new Prime Minister. He also called for the suspension of Idi Amin, the second highest ranking officer in the army on grounds that he had participated in the looting of Gold and Ivory from the Congo (Zaire). Obote responded to this accusation with coercion and intimidated parliamentarians opposed to his tarnished leadership. Vocal parliamentarians like Mathias Ngobi, Daudi Ochieng were arrested. Amin was not suspended but, instead, sent on two weeks leave.³⁶⁰

This event brought the Obote-Mutesa II confrontation to a height never experienced before. Both leaders then resorted to ethnic manipulation, with the military as the main sector to win over. While Kabaka Mutesa II put his trust in the Teso and Bantu elements in the army, Obote solicited the support of high-ranking northerners, notably from Lango (Obote's tribe), Acholi (Lwo brothers) and few from West Nile led by Idi Amin. The Obote government also expanded the Ugandan army until it was the seventh largest on the continent.³⁶¹ Obote then accused Mutesa II of colluding with the Iteso army commander, Brigadier Shaban Opolot, to use the army to topple the government. The plot was an excuse for Obote to arrest some of the chief supporters of the Kabaka on May 22, 1966, including Brigadier Opolot. He also organized a battalion under Idi Amin to storm the Kabaka's palace at Lubiri. This forms the 1966 crisis, as known in Uganda's history.³⁶² The first major victim of the Obote coup of 1966 had been the 1962 Constitution and constitutionalism in post-Obote Uganda.

³⁶⁰ H. Kyemba, *A State of Blood*, 24.

³⁶¹ A. Mazrui & M. Tidy, *Nationalism and New States in Africa* (London: Longman Publishing house, 1984), 250.

³⁶² E. Masinde-Aseka, *Transformational Leadership in East Africa*, 316

The 1962 Constitution had been the result of protracted negotiations involving the colonial power, ethnic forces and the political parties. It had given political ethnic leaders an opportunity for meaningful political action. Therefore without it, Uganda entered a political abyss and rule of tyrants.

The result of this crisis ran deep in Uganda's history and state security. Buganda as a region and the Baganda as a people were isolated by other tribes. This made the Buganda support anyone opposed to Obote and explains their support for the Amin coup of 1971 and the NRA war under Museveni against Obote between 1981 and 1985. Other regions and especially Buganda, later, also felt that northerners had dominated the Obote government at their expense. The evidence they had was very strong. Milton Obote (northerner) became President after the crisis of 1966, while Felix Kenyi Onama (northerner) was Defence Minister, Erinayo Oryema (northerner) Inspector-General of police and Akena-Adoko (northerner) was Head of Intelligence.³⁶³ This polarization accounts greatly for the upheavals that followed. Idi Amin also exploited this period of crisis to recruit many Nubians and Southern Sudanese into the Ugandan army. Their careers in the army depended on Amin alone and they owed him and not Obote personal loyalty.³⁶⁴

Other than involving the army in solving what was largely a political problem, this intervention by Obote and Mutesa made the army less national and more ethnic in character. The dangers of politicizing the military largely accounts for

³⁶³ O. Amaza, *Museveni's Long March: From Guerilla to Statesman* (Kampala: Fountain publishers 1998), 152.

³⁶⁴ H. Kyemba, *A State of Blood*, 28.

the instability and unconstitutional regime change in post-independence Uganda. This supports this study's earlier argument that political leaders in Uganda should be held responsible for setting up the foundation where physical force became a matter of first choice rather than the last resort in the settlement of political differences. This weakened institutions like Parliament, the Judiciary, and the Constitution as a legal guide and other civilian institutions as arena for resolving political conflicts.

In 1967 Obote then proceeded to introduce his own rules of the game by promulgating the 1967 Republican Constitution and the resultant subsequent move to the left. Through this un-debated constitution, traditional rulers like Kabaka Mutesa II were deposed. This dictatorial constitution was not endorsed by the population but by members of Parliament whose terms of office should have ended that year.³⁶⁵

These rules of the game were an apparent attempt by Obote to regularize and legitimize his seizure of power. However, the net effect of all this was to bring the Ugandan army into Uganda's politics since whoever had total command of the army took over power, albeit unconstitutionally. The army or military then became the judge in civil or political matters.

The net effect of Obote's success after 1967 should not be viewed narrowly from the angle that he had defeated Kabaka Mutesa II and abolished kingdoms in Uganda, but rather that he had, by so doing, precisely undermined the politico-

³⁶⁵ A.B.K, Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 60.

civilian institutions; something that he so badly needed to do in order to legitimize his coup. By weakening such institutions as Parliament, the civil society and the Constitution, he introduced and defined his own rules of the game where the army came to occupy and play a central role as mediator in civilian struggles. To show the priority given to Defence, by 1968, the Ministry of Defence allocation was 10.2 percent of the national budget (in Kenya, it was 6.9 percent and in Tanzania 3.8 percent) or more than £ 17 million.³⁶⁶ This reliance on the army, in turn, generated within the army as an institution, a sense of political functional indispensability in post-independence politics in Uganda. Leaders after Obote have not corrected this anomaly and this forms the basis of disagreements and conflicts. The rise to power of Idi Amin in 1971 exacerbated the situation.

Idi Amin's period (1971-1979)

On 25th January 1971, Idi Amin and his troops seized power from Milton Obote unconstitutionally, in a coup. Idi Amin was not a maverick intrusion upon the Uganda political scene because he had been deeply and significantly entwined in it before 1971. As Apollo Nsibambi has put it, "he (Amin) was a product of Uganda's political culture; his coming to power being directly linked to the social cleavages that have hindered Uganda's national integration, the failure of Uganda's politicians to devise peaceful methods of conflict resolution, and above all the greed of Ugandans to "eat" by controlling the state".³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ M. Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*, 290.

³⁶⁷ A. Nsibambi, "Political Integration in Uganda: Problems and Prospects", in *East African Journal* (Feb. 1968), 31-9.

In 1971 when Amin overthrew Obote, the political elite under Obote had very little support outside its own ranks precisely because the only classes capable of independent political organization, like the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat, had been paralyzed. As a result of Obote's reliance on the military for both defence and advice, the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat had almost no role to play in the day to-day administration of Uganda. He also instilled a state of fear that no group could easily rise to challenge his policies or to offer Uganda any meaningful advice. Uganda was largely a 'one man state' at the time of the Amin coup of 1971. Parliament, the political parties and other civilian institutions as arenas for resolving political conflicts had long been relegated into the background by Obote and other competing leaders. The army, therefore, remained strong because it had arms and disciplined organization. Conscious of their weaknesses, other classes like the petty bourgeoisie, the proletariat, and locals like the Baganda sought alliance with Amin and the army.³⁶⁸

While justifying the coup of January 1971, Amin gave 18 points for his course of action. He also announced on the radio that his would be a purely caretaker administration.³⁶⁹ However, as it later turned out, Amin ruled Uganda for over eight years. His aim while in power was not to implement a program or impose an ideology or improve the lot of his people, but merely to have power and reap its benefits. As Kasoozi noted, Amin's greatest preoccupation was survival.³⁷⁰ He did this by physically eliminating his enemies in the army, the police, the

³⁶⁸ M. Mamdani, *Imperialism and Fascism in Uganda* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976), 42-43.

³⁶⁹ J. Mittelman, *Out of Underdevelopment: Prospects for the Third World* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1988), 168.

³⁷⁰ A. B. Kasoozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 104.

prisons, and among civilians. His loomed large over any institution in the country during his rule. This largely explains why any explanation of the miserable performance of his regime focuses mostly on Amin, as an individual..

Immediately after Amin's coup, as Hansen writes, "Obote the individual became identified with the Lango group and his regime with the Acholi as well".³⁷¹ During the early years of his violent rule, Idi Amin extended terror into northern Uganda when he ordered mass killings of Acholi army personnel as well as execution of prominent Acholi individuals.³⁷² As Hansen correctly put it, "Had the vengeance of the coup been directed at the government of Obote as a whole, it would have had to be directed at people from almost every corner of Uganda".³⁷³

Obote drew his ministers from West Nile, Lango, Acholi, Kigezi, Ankole, Buganda, Bunyoro, Toro and elsewhere".³⁷⁴ Witch hunting of Acholi soldiers continued to the different barracks in Uganda. In March 1971, more than thirty Acholi and Langi soldiers were dynamited at Makindye Barracks. On 22nd July 1971, between 150 to 500 Acholi and Langi from Simba Battalion, Mbarara were herded into trucks, taken to an isolated ranch and gunned down. Further massacres of soldiers from these ethnic groups occurred at military barracks at Masindi, Soroti and Kitgum.³⁷⁵

³⁷¹ H. Holger, "Ethnicity and Military Rule in Uganda", 92.

³⁷² A.G.G. Ginyera-Pincywa, *Northern Uganda in National Politics*, 4. See also H. Holger, "Ethnicity and Military rule in Uganda, 104, and S.R. Karugire, *Roots of Political Instability in Uganda*, 77.

³⁷³ H. Holger, "Ethnicity and Military rule in Uganda", 104.

³⁷⁴ A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda*, 117.

³⁷⁵ A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*, 111.

The point to be made from the above is that post-independence leadership in Uganda took revenge against members of other ethnic groups on account of the fact that past leaders came from their areas/ethnic group instead of adopting remedial steps to promote unity. The political formulae that Idi Amin adopted made thousands of Acholi and Langi individuals flee the country to neighbouring countries like Kenya and Tanzania from where they re-grouped against his regime.

Secondly, such politics of revenge and indiscriminate extermination of tribes just because past leaders came from those regions or tribes left a permanent scar of hatred in Uganda. It is not surprising that after the fall of Idi Amin in 1979, West Nilers were to be stereotyped in the person of Idi Amin (himself a Kakwa of that region). During Obote's second term in power (1980-85), soldiers in the new army, including Acholi individuals, took revenge on people living in the West Nile region.³⁷⁶ Consequently those ex-soldiers and pro-Amin individuals who escaped into Zaire (DRC) regrouped and launched attacks in the West Nile region of Uganda. This strengthens our earlier argument that conflict in Uganda is largely because the leaders polarized the country for their selfish political interests.

When Idi Amin seized power, one of the promises he made was to organize free and fair elections which, according to him, civilian political leaders had failed to do for the eight years they were in power. Amin was reported to have said:

³⁷⁶ J. Crisp, "Uganda Refugees in Sudan and Zaire: The Problem of Repatriation", *African Affairs*, 85, 339 (1986), 163-180. See also A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 17.

The military must support a civilian government that has the support of the people. Mine therefore will be a caretaker administration after which free and fair elections will soon be held.³⁷⁷

Amin's viewpoint coincided with those of the silent majority in the country then. Most supported Amin simply because of their hatred for Obote who had exhibited a high propensity to monopolize political power in the country either by the use of the army or through camouflage of his UPC party. Amin's promise did not materialize. He instead introduced the famous "Elders forum"³⁷⁸ in which he began to condemn politicians and political parties.³⁷⁹ Amin later promulgated a Decree dissolving all elected District and Urban councils³⁸⁰. He banned all political parties and proscribed political activities of any nature.

As it later turned out, Amin did what his predecessor had done by adopting a political formula that suited his interests and that of the people he purported to represent. He later declared that,

The military should remain in power for at least five years so that the people may be educated to think in terms of Uganda as a whole and to love and respect one another in the spirit of brotherhood, unity and equality.³⁸¹

The overall consequence of this declaration was that soldiers came to occupy the most central place within the political system with a role that was pervasive; embracing the entire spectrum of governmental functions, and going right down to the grassroots level. Amin also suspended several significant sections of the

³⁷⁷ G. Ibingira, *African Upheavals Since Independence* (Boulder: West View Press, 1980), 75.

³⁷⁸ In every district, Idi Amin instructed his military attaches to identify prominent elders to constitute a kind of consultative forum and to advise on local issues pertaining to their areas.

³⁷⁹ F. Bwengye, *The Agony of Uganda: From Idi Amin to Obote*, (London: Regency Press, 1985), 37.

³⁸⁰ For details see Decree 2 of 2nd Feb. 1971

³⁸¹ See *Uganda Argus*, 21 Feb, 1971.

1967 Constitution, including Article, 3 and 63, through the issue of the Legal Notice No. I of 1971.³⁸² This basically meant that the constitution was no longer supreme law and that it could be altered without reference to Parliament.³⁸³ It also meant that Parliament was suspended until further notice. From then on, Idi Amin's government developed a profound faith in militarism as a formula for achieving and maintaining state power. Militarism became the norm in Ugandan politics and society. The regime had no respect for constitutionalism and the rule of law. In legal theory, according to Barya, constitutionalism rests upon the principle of limited government that is expressed in the doctrine of separation of power.³⁸⁴ In Amin's regime, however, the President himself became the head of the land and also the sole lawmaker. Judicial scrutiny over several aspects of the exercise of executive power was eliminated and quasi-judicial powers were conferred to a number of military and para-military institutions such as the Military Tribunal, the Economic Crimes Tribunal, the State Research Bureau, the Military Police and the Armed Forces.³⁸⁵

During the eight years of his rule, the armed forces were absolved of any misdemeanor in respect of anything done for the purpose of maintaining law and order and public security in any part of Uganda from the time of the military take over.³⁸⁶ Amin's soldiers used this "blanket protection" to undertake

³⁸² Masinde Aseka, *Transformational Leadership in East Africa*, 323.

³⁸³ Masinde Aseka, *Transformational Leadership in East Africa*, 323. See also Oloka-Onyango, *Judicial Power and Constitutionalism in Uganda* (Kampala: CBR Publications, 1993), 30.

³⁸⁴ J.B. Barya, *Popular Democracy and the Legitimacy of the Constitution. Some Reflections on Uganda's Constitution Making Process* (Kampala: CBR Publications, 1993), 3.

³⁸⁵ E. Masinde Aseka, *Transformational Leadership in East Africa*, 324

³⁸⁶ A. Mazrui & M. Tidy, *Nationalism and New States in Africa*, 172.

revenge killings in parts of Acholiland and Lango on the grounds that these areas were Obote domains.

Amin's use of force to sustain himself in power earned him many enemies both within Uganda and abroad. As time went on, the regime faced great economic and political hardships. To divert the attention of Ugandans from their plight, Amin decided to invade the Kagera salient of Tanzania on October 28, 1978. The Tanzanian government responded by invading Uganda.³⁸⁷ In 1979 Tanzanian troops-assisted Ugandan exiles to fight Amin. In April 1979, Amin's personalist regime was brought to an end. Amin's regime had rested heavily on neo-patrimonial ties in society to the detriment of other civil-political institutions.

A critical analysis of the Amin regime and leadership illustrates that it was a 'one-man' state where the leader acted contrary to the constitution. He promoted the ideology of militarism more than Obote had done by usurping the powers of all civilian institutions like Parliament, civil society organizations, and the judiciary. As Omara Otunnu rightly observes,

Militarism germinates, takes root and flourishes in society when the military usurps power. Military coups acquire a tradition and bring about a change in the power relations of the society by their impact on the citizenry. Thus military coups and military rule legitimize violence and sanction military means as a method in their general efforts to shift power relations and in social relations.³⁸⁸

Indeed, the most enduring legacy of Idi Amin's rule in Uganda may be militarism, which his regime nurtured and bequeathed to the socio-political

³⁸⁷ A. W. Maiso, "A History of Multiparty Democracy in Uganda, 1962-1983", (M.A Dissertation, History Dept, Makerere University, 1994), 210.

³⁸⁸ A. Omara-Otunnu, "The Dynamics of Conflict in Uganda", in Oliver Furley (Ed.), *Conflict in Africa* (London: I.B Touris Publishers, 1995), 403.

system.³⁸⁹ The militarism during Idi Amin's rule was perhaps best captured by the grammar of power at the time: 'I can fight, therefore I must rule'. Today in Uganda, militarism has graduated that grammar into the NRA dictum, according to Otunnu, "I fought, therefore I must rule" or "I shall kill anybody who plays about with my army".³⁹⁰ In essence such "hard talk" is not reconciliatory but simply pushes ex-soldiers and deposed politicians into conflict as the only alternative.

Militarism, which has its roots in civil-military relations and the nature of the state in colonialism, has now gained sanction and social currency in Uganda and has terminally affected socio-political processes and economic activities in the country.

In the period after Amin's fall, the military came to dominate the political space in Uganda at the expense of civilian institutions. For example, after political differences arising out of, for instance, the rigging of elections or the unequal distribution of political posts in the cabinet or other central government organs, the military option became the first rather than the last resort. Political leaders with strong support within the military quickly resorted to the option, leading to conflicts in parts of Uganda.

³⁸⁹ A. Omara-Otunnu, "The Dynamics of Conflict in Uganda", Chapters 8-14.

³⁹⁰ A. Omara-Otunnu, "The Dynamics of Conflict in Uganda", 403.

Weak leadership and political chaos in Uganda, 1979-1985

After the fall of Idi Amin in April 1979, it was hoped that Ugandans would realize that the country's problems were mainly due to political disorganization and especially inept leadership. It was hoped that Ugandans would strive to build viable political institutions with mechanisms to resolve conflicts peacefully. This, however, was not to be. Ugandans then discovered that it was easier to overthrow a bad government and leader than to create a good one. Post-Idi Amin leaders adopted "a winner takes all" type of politics and struggle that plunged Uganda into a 5 year civil war between 1981 and 1985.

In March 1979, the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF), a coalition of Ugandan exile groups, was created at the Moshi Conference convened under Tanzania's auspices. It set up a National Consultative Council (NCC), a National Executive Council (NEC) and a Military Commission which took over after the liberation in April 1979.³⁹¹ The NCC had a daunting task to restore political and economic stability and to establish new institutional arrangements which would serve as the basis for a viable democratic system for the future.

The political situation in Uganda between April 1979, when Idi Amin was overthrown, and 1986, when the National Resistance Movement of Yoweri Museveni took charge, was largely chaotic. In this period alone, Ugandans were subjected to the inept leadership of five presidents and separate governments. These included Yusuf Lule, (68 days from April 15-June 21 1979), Lukongwa

³⁹¹ E. A. Brett, "Neutralising the Use of Force in Uganda: The Role of the Military in Politics", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 331, (1995), 129-152.

Binaisa (June 22 1979- May 1980), Paulo Muwanga (May 1980-Dec 1980),
Second Obote regime (10 Dec 1980- July 27 1985) and Tito-Okello Lutwa.³⁹²

These governments and the different leaders exhibited a number of weaknesses. First, none of them had a firm hold on the police, the secret services, the army or the prisons. Lines of authority and power in both government and paramilitary agencies were chaotic with the result, for example, that the soldiers in the Binaisa, Obote and Okello governments often defied orders and behaved unprofessionally throughout most of the period. As Museveni lamented, “even Amin’s soldiers had been unruly and undisciplined, but until 1977, he had enforced brutal control over them and, in consequence, most of Uganda”.³⁹³ Most of these governments were overly dependent on foreigners for political survival.³⁹⁴

Moreover, none of the five governments that succeeded Idi Amin was elected by the people of Uganda, and, hence, none had political legitimacy. Obote claimed that he was voted into office in 1980 by the people, but in reality, he had ascended to power on the whims of the army and the electoral commission put in place by his henchman in UPC, Paulo Muwanga, then head of the Military Commission.

³⁹² *Daily Monitor* 9th April 2007. See also F. Bwengye, *The Agony of Uganda*, 37.

³⁹³ Onyango-Odongo, “The Historical Memories of Armed Conflict in Uganda”, (Kampala, Unpublished), 11-12.

³⁹⁴ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985*, 123.



68 days of the Lule Leadership

The Moshi Conference held in Tanzania in April 1979 elected Professor Yusuf Kironde Lule as chairman of the Uganda National Liberation Front and, subsequently, first post-Amin President. However, after a mere 68 days, he was violently removed from office.

On taking over the reins of rule, the new government was mired in political intrigues, and ideological and constitutional wrangles. Like leaders before him, Lule attempted to reorganize the army by implementing a quota system of enlistment as recommended by his political adviser-Professor Semakula-Kiwanuka. He recommended that the number of recruits from each ethnic group should be proportionate to the numerical strength of that group in the country as a whole.³⁹⁵

The aim was to enlist most of his Baganda tribesmen into the army as a way to counter the Uganda People's Congress and the Acholi-Langi tribesmen of Obote who then dominated the Liberation army. Mamdani demonstrates that, like Amin who organized a large-scale recruitment of the urban riff-raff into the army, Lule behaved in more or less the same way, if not worse. In his determination to eliminate supposed UPC threats, Lule also demoted Paulo Muwanga by transferring him from the sensitive portfolio of internal affairs Minister to Labour and Yoweri Museveni from Defence to that of Regional

³⁹⁵ G .W. Maiso, "A History of Multiparty Democracy in Uganda", 217.

Cooperation.³⁹⁶ He then argued that the constitution gave him powers to do so even without consulting the National Consultative Council. As he stated,

The constitution of a state is different from that of a party which is in government, and clearly the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) is quite analogous to a party in this regard. The former establishes the state, the organs of its government and their respective functions; the latter establishes the structure of the party (i.e. UNLF) and its goals which its government must accomplish under the state constitution.³⁹⁷

This became a source of conflict between President Lule and the National Consultative Council. It also showed how Lule wanted to exploit 'loopholes' in the constitution to deepen the political directions of NCC.

Like Obote in the 1960s, Lule had tried to use constitutional provisions and to manipulate the constitution to protect his interest. However, unlike Obote then who had infiltrated the military and used it to protect his interest, Lule had not. Worse still, in the National Consultative Council was the famous "GANG of FOUR" that included Professors: Rugumayo, Dan Wadada Nubudere, Omwony Ojok and Yash Tandon who were also interested in leading Uganda then. On June 21 1979, Lule was removed from office after a vote of no-confidence by the Uganda National Liberation Front's (NCC) reportedly orchestrated by the "gang of four".³⁹⁸

Besides, there were the pro-Obote elements in the army and administration. As J. Mulira put it, Obote was a factor in all the chaos between 1979 and 1985.

³⁹⁶ G .W. Maiso, "A History of Multiparty Democracy in Uganda", 217.

³⁹⁷ Muyanda-Mutebi, *Uganda Since the War of 1979* (Kampala, Unpublished), 27.

³⁹⁸ *The Daily Monitor* 9 October, 2007, See also interview with Dan Nabudere, 8/10/2007.

Obote's influence then was indirectly promoted by General Tito Okello, Chief of Staff, David Oyite-Ojok and the over 5000 soldiers that Oyite had recruited from the Langi, Acholi and Iteso communities in and around Kampala³⁹⁹. As Lule later confessed in an interview, "there were many pro-Obote elements in the government that had been forced on me by Tanzania".⁴⁰⁰

As president, Lule failed to contend with the political forces in the post-Amin era. He failed to divide those working against his interests or unite them into a single force working for him. He even failed to exploit the bitter differences that existed between the intellectuals such as the "Gang of four" and the Obote elements. Instead, through his actions, he united them against himself. As Kasozi ably put it, Lule did not realize that it was the Uganda National Liberation Front and not the Constitution that had put him in power.⁴⁰¹

Lule's fall helps to support this study's position stated earlier that conflict in Uganda can squarely be blamed on the Ugandan political leadership and especially its failure to work out basic political consensus on how to resolve political differences short of physical force. It further illustrates how fragmented the Uganda political elite was on political issues. Each group or leader in power attempted to retain power at the expense of other groups. In most cases such competing groups opted to operate outside the constitution, leading to conflict, division and ethnic politics in the state. The Baganda felt disillusioned and demonstrated in Kampala streets calling for the immediate reinstatement of

³⁹⁹ Interview with J. Mulira on 8th October, 2007

⁴⁰⁰ A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 130.

⁴⁰¹ A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 131.

Lule. They also accused Obote and his Langi tribesmen and their Acholi cousins of brewing trouble for Lule. Lwanga Lunyiigo, currently a Presidential adviser to Yoweri Museveni, has even claimed elsewhere that Lule was removed from power in 1979 mainly because of an attempt to shift the ethnic composition of the army away from the northerners.⁴⁰²

The Baganda then resorted to clandestine activities against later governments. This partly explains why the Baganda effectively supported Yoweri Museveni during his five-year bush war against the second Obote regime between 1981 and 1985. The Baganda have, since the 1966 crisis, remained a strong force in the center of Uganda that all political leaders have had either to manipulate to rise to and keep power or ignore and have problems. As Ali Mazrui has written of Ugandan politics, “Uganda is an impossible country to govern effectively with the support of the Baganda, but it is also impossible to govern effectively without the support of the Baganda”.⁴⁰³

Following the removal of Professor Lule, the post of President of Uganda fell vacant and the National Consultative Council (NCC) immediately voted to fill this post. Three contestants emerged, that is, Godfrey Binaisa, Edward Rugumayo, the then chairman of the NCC, and Paulo Muwanga, the then Minister of Internal Affairs. Binaisa, a former Attorney General of Uganda, emerged as the winner. He was elected chairman of the National Executive

⁴⁰² P. Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence: A Story of Unfulfilled Hopes*, (London: Hurst & Company, 1992), 130.

⁴⁰³ A. Mazrui, “The Social Origin of Uganda’s Presidents: From King to Peasant Warrior”, *Canada Journal of African Studies*, 1 (1974), 3-23.

Committee of the UNLF and, subsequently, the President of the Republic of Uganda.⁴⁰⁴

The Binaisa Regime (June 22, 1979-May 1980)

Godfrey Lukongwa Binaisa was not new to Uganda's turbulent history and politics of manipulation. Born in 1920, Binaisa was first appointed Uganda's Attorney General in 1962 and had been very instrumental in the formulation of the Republic constitution of 1967.⁴⁰⁵

Under Binaisa, the UNLF organized elections to fill 60 vacant seats of the NCC, reserved for people who had stayed in Uganda during Amin's regime and who did not attend the Moshi Conference.⁴⁰⁶ The army, which Lule had neglected, would get 10 seats and women would get 9 elected members. The council expanded from 30 to 127 delegates through a process that many considered as favouring the Uganda Peoples Congress of Milton Obote.⁴⁰⁷

Unlike Lule, Godfrey Binaisa tried his best to contend with the political forces that Lule's regime had failed to contain/engage. However, he fell victim to the conspiratorial methods of political behaviour so typical of Uganda by his complicity in eliminating forces that would have protected him.

⁴⁰⁴ F. Bwengye, *The Agony of Uganda*, 41.

⁴⁰⁵ In an interview with Binaisa in 2007, he strongly believes that his role in formulating the 1967 constitution and its details saved Uganda a lot of trouble. He does not regret doing it even when sections of the political elite have always argued that this manipulation of the 1962 independence constitution and 1967 constitution are the real causes of trouble in Uganda.

⁴⁰⁶ F. Bwengye, *The Agony of Uganda*, 41.

⁴⁰⁷ Interview with P. Mulira, 8th October, 2007.

In his bid to diffuse the political clout of the military in politics in the country, he dismissed the Army Chief of Staff David Oyite Ojok without consulting the Military Commission and appointed him Uganda's Ambassador to Algeria, claiming that he wanted to improve discipline and to help build good public relations between the army and the public at large. His main interest was to eliminate the strong army chief, then the highest Langi in the army and Obote's ardent supporter. He avoided consulting the Military Commission under Paulo Muwanga partly because Muwanga had challenged him for the post of President and also because Muwanga was Obote's 'henchman'.⁴⁰⁸ His failure to heed the demands of the Military Commission led to the Commission deposing him from power.⁴⁰⁹ This was Uganda's first bloodless coup where Binaisa's cabinet was dissolved and the former President put under house arrest. The Military Commission then went ahead to arrange for General elections in 1980.⁴¹⁰

The December 1980 elections organized by the Military Commission were mainly a contest between the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) led by Obote and the Democratic Party (DP) led by Paul Semwogerere. The other parties were the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM) led by Yoweri Museveni and the Conservative Party, a successor party to the Kabaka Yekka (KY), led by Joshua Mayanja-Nkangi. The UPC was declared elected, but the result was disputed and rejected by the Democratic Party and the UPM of Yoweri Museveni which had managed to win only one seat to parliament. This was the main reason advanced by Yoweri Museveni to start a five year bush war against the

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with P. Mulira, 8th October, 2007.

⁴⁰⁹ E. Masinde Aseka, *Transformational Leadership in East Africa*, 334.

⁴¹⁰ A. Gakwandi, *Uganda Pocket Facts*, 24.

government and leadership of Obote in 1981, proving that, as one political commentator-Kintu Nyago stated in the *Daily Monitor*, “the failure by a section of the Ugandan political elite to channel their political demands and grievances through the existing constitutional framework is the main source of conflict”.⁴¹¹ This seems to be the case in the period 1981 to 1985 when Museveni started and fought a bush war in Luwero (in Buganda) against Obote and led to the 20 year old conflict pitting different rebel groups in Acholiland against the Museveni government and leadership in northern Uganda. In the period that followed this election, Ugandan politics degenerated into open ethnic backed conflicts.

The rebellion in the South that Obote faced, led by Y. Museveni and his NRA in the Luwero triangle was paralleled by one in West Nile which was initiated by members of the Former Uganda National Army (FUNA). Moyo and Arua areas were identified with Amin and blamed by many Acholi for the massacres of 1971. In late 1980, FUNA invaded the district and occupied Arua. The UNLA, mainly composed of Acholi troops, responded to this with widespread attacks on civilians, leading to a guerilla war which drove hundreds of thousands across the border, tied down some army units, and guaranteed further support for a rebellion which could have been avoided with careful handling by Obote and his subordinates. According to Major General Emilio-Mondo, General Mustapha Adrisi, Brigadier Killi, local people in Arua believed Obote, as an individual,

⁴¹¹ *Daily Monitor* 5, October 2007.

hated West Nilers.⁴¹² As evidence of his leadership weakness, Obote did not visit such areas to dispel such propaganda and beliefs.

The second Obote regime (1980-1985)

In December 1980, Obote formed his second administration (the first having been between 1962 and 1971). This was after the 1980 disputed elections in which UPC and Obote claimed victory. Many groups in Uganda did not regard these elections as having been free and fair at all. The elections were actually won by the Democratic Party, which swept Buganda and Busoga with a landslide.⁴¹³

Talking about the election and its aftermath, Museveni, then the leader of the opposition Uganda Patriotic Movement said:

it was clear that the UPC and Obote were heading for a resounding defeat in spite of all the rigging they had done at the earlier stage of registration of voters, nomination of candidates and demarcation of electoral boundaries.⁴¹⁴

This marked the beginning of difficult years for Ugandans. First, Museveni and his Uganda Patriotic Movement rejected the outcome of the 1986 elections and later began a guerilla war against the second Obote regime. In February, civil war began. This war raged on for five years between February 1981 and 26 January 1986 when Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Army stormed Kampala, the capital city and took over power. Violence characterized

⁴¹² Interview with retired Amin soldiers, Major. Gen. Emilio-Mondo and General Mustapha – 20 October 2007 at Arua.

⁴¹³ E. Masinde-Aseka, *Transformational Leadership in East Africa*, 335

⁴¹⁴ Amaza-Ondoga, *Museveni's Long March from Guerilla to Statesman*, 19.

the second Obote regime right from 1980 to his fall in 1985. The opposition Obote faced was intense and sustained throughout his second tenure.⁴¹⁵

Obote had thought that he could easily rely on the army and a divided ethnic Uganda to keep power as he had done in his first tenure (1962-1971). However, he was wrong. Resistance to the second Obote government began effectively when the different fighting groups crystallized into formidable movements.⁴¹⁶ The most significant movement remained the National Resistance Movement under Yoweri Museveni. Others were the Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM) led by Andrew Kayiira and The Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF) in West Nile, chaired by Brigadier Moses Ali (former member of the Uganda Army of Idi Amin).⁴¹⁷

Within the Uganda National liberation Front, an anti-dictatorship group was also formed, led by the “Gang of Four” that was made up of Edward Rugumayo, Dan Wadada Nabudere, Omwony-Ojok and Yash Tandon. Their strategy was not to go to full-scale war but to resolve political differences through round table conferences. They thought that the solution to Uganda’s problems was democracy and that democracy could only be achieved by all political groups coming together as they had done at Moshi and planning a strategy⁴¹⁸. Whereas their aims were noble and suggested methods were good, they could not achieve much in a country where the other political elite regarded the military option as

⁴¹⁵ Interview with Godfrey Binasisa, 2007 January

⁴¹⁶ A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 166

⁴¹⁷ Harrell-Bond and Barbara E, *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees*, (Oxford: University Press, 1986),

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⁴¹⁸ Interview with Nabudere-Mbale 10 September 2007.

the best solution to political problems. Worse still, this group (UNLF-anti-dictatorship) remained elitist and did not address itself to the role of peasants in the political process. They published hundreds of papers and booklets that exposed the Obote regime, but that was all they did.⁴¹⁹ Whereas they contributed to the psychological warfare, they remained ineffective against a regime and leadership that was used to the role of military force and military solutions for even political problems.

Obote had come to power through the use of violence and set in motion a program where the army remained the anchor of politics in Uganda. In 1985, he was removed from power violently by his one-time loyal Generals, Tito Okello and Bazilio Okello. Although these two soldiers administered the “coup de grace”, their regime was rendered helpless by the other fighting movements. The Okellos felt that they were tired of fighting for greedy political leaders. This led to their mutiny in 1985 which ended in the coup against Obote.

The second Obote regime and its preoccupation with wars of resistance brought about internal division between the two ethnic groups that had until then dominated politics and the military in Uganda (i.e. the Acholi and Langi). The Acholi in the army, fighting against Museveni and other rebel leaders, began to complain that their deaths were disproportionately high and that only Langi soldiers were being promoted. They were confirmed in their belief when Obote

⁴¹⁹ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 170.

by passed senior Acholi officers and chose a Langi, Smith Opon-Acak, as his new Chief of Staff after the death of Oyite Ojok.⁴²⁰

Obote's cabinet was also divided between two principal factions. The first, led by the President himself, consisted of young men in their early forties or late thirties and included Chris Rwakasis, Peter Otai, Dr. Luwuliza Kirunda and others. This group controlled the National Security Agency (NASA); a spy network that had information on many people and organizations suspected of being hostile to the UPC government. The other faction was led by Paulo Muwanga, with the co-operation of many Acholi elite led by Otema Alimadi (the Prime Minister and an Acholi) and General Tito Okello.⁴²¹ This second faction, largely constituted by Acholi, wanted to negotiate with rebel factions opposed to Obote but were foiled by the Obote faction that believed in total warfare.

The political elite and leadership got seriously divided and this greatly assisted the National Resistance Movement/Army of Museveni to advance against the UNLA forces. Even at this stage, Obote still failed to realize that power never belongs to an individual but to an organized group. Once his UPC group began to disintegrate, Obote's powers weakened drastically. Worse still, the weakening of the Acholi/Langi alliance meant that Obote could not hold on to power for long. By June 1985, dissent in the ranks of Obote's army became public as disagreements between General Tito Okello and Army Chief of Staff-Opon Acak intensified. In the North, Bazilio Okello, an Acholi officer, began to mobilize his

⁴²⁰ A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 172.

⁴²¹ Onyango Odongo, "The Historical Memories of Armed Conflicts in Uganda 11.

forces after disobeying Obote's orders that he returns to Kampala. This was the beginning of a mutiny that Obote could not resist. Acholi soldiers, who Obote had relied on for long to keep power, turned guns against him, and on 27 July 1985, announced a coup against the Obote administration.⁴²² General Tito Okello was then proclaimed the Head of State. The Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) became riddled with defection and desertions as hundreds of members and sometimes whole formations left to join the National Resistance Army (NRA) of Yoweri Museveni.⁴²³

Obote's second regime (1980-1985) was the greatest disservice to Ugandans. Violence was always high throughout the regime and, unlike Idi Amin who had managed to take control of the army even at periods of turbulence, Obote did not. One may also argue that if Obote had allowed the democratic process to run its course, the blood bath of 1981-1985 could have been avoided. However, by thinking that he could force the population to accept him, he failed to measure the limits of his political power. The opposition that Obote faced was intense and sustained throughout his second tenure. He even failed to exploit the North-South divide as he had done before and, instead, fell because of North-North divide, involving the Acholi against the Langi. The downfall of Milton Obote on 27 July 1985 did not lead to immediate peace in Uganda. It instead exposed the fragmented nature of Uganda's political and military elite, subsequently leading to more chaos and war.

⁴²² E. Masinde Aseka, *Transformational Leadership in East Africa*, 337.

⁴²³ O. Amaza-Ondoga, *Museveni's Long March from Guerilla to Statesman*, 55.

By early 1984, Obote's position had become tenuous. He never had the support of his overseas backers and the cost of the war had by then eliminated the economic recovery initiated with the structural adjustment programme in 1981-1982. Officials and politicians received negligible incomes and many behaved with complete cynicism. Services deteriorated further and corruption and the black economy flourished.⁴²⁴ One would have expected that Uganda's political and military elite would have quickly exploited this to overthrow Obote. This, however, did not happen then and it was only when Obote fell out with his Acholi officers that he lost power in a coup.

Obote's long stay in power up to 1985 was largely due to division and petty squabbles among the elite especially between Yoweri Museveni and the Baganda group led by Andrew Kayiira. Between 1981 and 1985, several secret meetings were organized by the different opposition groups like Museveni's NRA, Kayiira's UFM, and the Uganda Democratic Freedom Movement [FEDEMU] on how to remove Obote, but none of them was successful. In July 1985 when Obote was overthrown, Museveni was still preoccupied with his guerilla war in Luwero in Buganda, while other rebel groups also operated within parts of Buganda but with minor impact. All these forces and their activities gained momentum after the internal division between the Acholi and Langi-dominated government had brought Obote's rule to an end.

⁴²⁴ E A. Brett, "Neutralising the Use of Force in Uganda: The Role of the Military in Politics", 129-152.

Tito Okello's leadership and continued conflict in Uganda

Tito Okello was the first and only president to hail from Acholiland since independence in 1962. Before his rise to a leadership position in 1985, Tito Okello served as Obote's top commander of the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA). He later became head of State after overthrowing his long time master Obote, with the assistance of Lt. General Bazilo Okello, also an Acholi.

In a country that was witnessing military coups in succession, General Tito Okello attempted to insulate his regime from the vices of militarism. He tried to achieve this by; among others, incorporating all the fighting factions into his government. He succeeded in wooing the remnants of the Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM), especially those who had formed a new wing that basically advocated for the restoration of the Kabaka of Buganda. This group was called the Uganda Democratic Freedom Movement (FEDEMU). Besides, there was also the Former Uganda National Army (FUNA). He called for an end to tribalism and appointed Paulo Muwanga, a Muganda, as Prime Minister in an effort to woo Buganda and forge a unity government.⁴²⁵

The main problem that the Okello government and leadership faced till its end remained Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Army. Even before Obote's downfall, Museveni had foiled all attempts to resolve political problems peacefully. He also frustrated the other forces like UFM and FEDEMU in their bid to organize one front against Obote. In one such meeting in 1981 at

⁴²⁵ Okello appeared well-intentioned, only that he lacked the capacity and shrewdness to handle the problems of the political elite then. He used very noble-Christian methods which people like Museveni just exploited to strengthen their grounds and topple him.

Makindye to forge ways of ousting Obote, Museveni categorically stated that “any meeting with non-military combatants to discuss military issues was useless because such people know nothing about armed political struggles”. He also later rejected the proposal for democratic control of the army on the grounds that he already had a “well-trained and organized fighting force, ready to begin a liberation war against Obote and the UNLA”.⁴²⁶ At that time, strong disagreement between Yoweri Museveni and the other freedom fighters ruled out any possibility of creating a democratic-unity front in Uganda to fight for real democracy or to solve issues democratically. Museveni insisted that he alone should carry out the difficult task of removing Obote.

Museveni’s negativity to Okello’s call for dialogue meant that, once again, ‘the gun rather than the ballot’ would determine the political course of politics in Uganda. Museveni’s main argument was that there had been no fundamental political change in Kampala. To join the Tito Okello regime would have been to compromise the democratic principles for which his National Resistance Army had fought for the previous five years.⁴²⁷

After persistent invitation to Museveni, Tito Okello later appealed to the Government of Kenya under Arap Moi to organize peace talks with all other political and military contenders as a way forward. This peace arrangement was bound to fail because the political and military leaders then still viewed each other with deep suspicion. In an interview with *DRUM Magazine* in Nairobi, in

⁴²⁶ Onyango-Odongo, “The Historical Memories of Armed Conflicts in Uganda”, 15.

⁴²⁷ A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origin of Violence in Uganda*, 174.

1985, as the peace talks were underway, Museveni categorically stated that “the problem in Uganda is that the leadership has mainly been from the north”. “The Acholi are everywhere:” he said, “in the army, big offices, etc. The southerners (and Museveni is a Munyankole from the South) have played a peripheral role since independence”.⁴²⁸ This apparent negative attitude meant that, even if the parties signed a peace agreement, which they did, Museveni would not respect its terms unless he was president. He also set several demands to frustrate Tito Okello’s efforts. For instance, he demanded that a new military council be formed where both Okello and Museveni would enjoy equal status and that the national army of Uganda should comprise the following: 3700 soldiers (44%) from General Okello’s UNLA, 3600 soldiers (42%) from Museveni’s NRA, and 12 soldiers from other groups.⁴²⁹ All this was accepted by Tito Okello as a way to reach a peaceful agreement and avoid war in Uganda as the only alternative to peace.

The two parties then signed the Nairobi Peace Accord (later called Peace Jokes’ by Ugandan scholars like George Kanyaihamba, now High Court judge) on 17 December 1985. Museveni later wrote back to President Moi of Kenya that his commanders had rejected the terms of the accord. The NRA also complained that the Okello ‘junta’ and its Military Council had not honoured the terms of the agreement.⁴³⁰ The truth about who violated the truce is difficult to deduce. However, all pointers indicate that Museveni felt strong enough to overran Kampala with or without the agreement. He had realized that division within the

⁴²⁸ See *Drum Magazine*, 1985, 9.

⁴²⁹ Onyango -Odongo, “The Historical Memories of Armed Conflict in Uganda”, 16.

⁴³⁰ See W. Gazozo, “Uganda’s Statement”, in *AfricAsia*, 25 (January 1986), 43-4.

UNLA made it possible for him then to overrun government forces. By so doing, Museveni set a precedent where other political and military groups opposed to his rule mistrusted him and also resorted to war as the only alternative. This has contributed to failure of peace accords between Museveni's NRA and rebels in Acholiland.

Museveni's Leadership

On 26 January 1986 Museveni and his National Resistance Army (NRA) drove Okello's poorly organised UNLA out of Kampala.⁴³¹ The UNLA then disintegrated as Amin's army had done. Whereas the NRA victory in Uganda remained quite unique and unusual in Africa because it marked the first successful overthrow of an indigenous government by a locally based guerilla movement, NRA victory did not lead to total peace in the country. In Northern Uganda, the NRA victory was greeted with guns.

As Brett, put it, "victorious regimes are tempted to assert their authority by punishing and humiliating the vanquished. Yet, coercion is an uncertain basis for political authority, since violence creates potential enemies who will comply only while they believe that resistance is impossible".⁴³² This has been a major failure of Uganda's post-colonial leaders, Museveni included. After his victory over Okello, Museveni's major mistake lay in his failure to persuade the ex-UNLA forces and their leaders to lay down arms and integrate with his NRA. Instead, there was a feeling that this was time for revenge for the Luwero

⁴³¹ *The Guardian*, 27 Jan, 1986

⁴³² E.A Brett, "Neutralizing the Use of Force in Uganda", 145.

massacre and ethnic cleansing on the Acholi for their domination of politics in Uganda. As one time Prime Minister of the Museveni regime, Kintu Musoke, once stated: “the Acholi have to pay for what they did in Luwero”.⁴³³

Indeed, after Museveni captured Kampala in 1986, soldiers from the previous government left the capital city and fled north and east of the country. By 1987, tens of thousands of animals and other assets had been lost and normal administration was suspended in the nine districts of Gulu, Kitgum (in Acholi), Apac and Lira (in Lango), Soroti, Kumi (in Teso), Kotido, Moroto (in Karamoja) and Palisa.⁴³⁴ Apart from the fact that these areas had been UPC strongholds, the initial response and attitude of the NRM leadership towards the remnants of the past regime, worsened an already difficult situation.

Museveni’s troops that followed remnants of Obote and Okello soldiers allegedly killed and raped and used other forms of physical abuse of non-combatants as well when they reached Acholiland, which was foreign territory to them.⁴³⁵ People in the war-torn Acholiland also saw the new army loot their cattle as revenge on all the Acholi for those few who had been party to the Obote and Okello governments.⁴³⁶

⁴³³ *The Monitor New Paper*, 129, 1996.

⁴³⁴ Other resistances were in Kasese led by former Amin soldier-Amon Bazira who was also deputy minister under Obote II.

⁴³⁵ R. Doom & Vlassenreot, “Kony’s Message: A New Koine? The Lords Resistance Army in Northern Uganda”, in *African Affairs*, (390) (1999), 98 5-36. See also Amii Omara-Otunnu, “The Dynamics of Conflict in Uganda”, 13 and M.L. Pirouet, “Human Rights Issues in Museveni’s Uganda” in H. Holger Bernt & M. Twaddle (Eds.), *Changing Uganda: The Dilemmas of Structural Adjustment Programme*, (London: James Currey, 1991), 16.

⁴³⁶ Interview with Ogenga-Latigo, 2007.

Conflict was greatest in Acholiland which had dominated the post-coup government. Yet even here, Tim Allen claims that there was initially little sympathy for the main rebel movement - the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA) among the Acholi population. However, the situation changed due to weaknesses of Museveni and his leaders and commanders. As Tim Allen remarked,

Most of the soldiers were taunted for their failure and castigated for their brutal actions in Luwero. (It was) killings by the 35th Battalion of NRA in Kitgum District (Acholiland), and a misguided government order for all ex-soldiers to report to barracks that caused the situation to deteriorate.⁴³⁷

This kind of order to all ex-soldiers to report to barracks reminded the Acholi of Amin's orders in 1971. In that year, Amin ordered the Acholi to report to barracks and massacred them. In pursuit of the unsuccessful radio order, heavily armed NRA troops were dispatched to various parts of Acholiland to hunt down ex-UNLA. Many ex-soldiers reacted to such orders by joining one or the other of the several rebel movements that sprung up in Acholiland. This shows how the weaknesses of Museveni and his army commanders laid ground for conflict in Acholiland.

Early rebellion against the NRM in the Teso region was also partly because of the weaknesses and arrogance of NRA leaders. The NRA was initially welcomed in Teso, which had also been harassed by Acholi soldiers after the 1985 coup by Tito Okello. According to some sources,⁴³⁸ the critical factor that precipitated rebellion in the Teso area was the NRA's decision to disarm local militia

⁴³⁷ T. Allen, "Understanding Alice: Uganda's Holy Spirit Movement in Context", *Africa*, 616, 3 (1991), 370-339.

⁴³⁸ Interview with Cuthbert Obwangor-Former Obote Minister 1962-1971 and respected elder.

previously set up by the Obote government to protect the inhabitants from Karimojong cattle raiders and the failure by the NRA to intervene when the Karimojong began raiding Teso area exclusively in 1986-87. Many believed that NRA soldiers were also involved in rustling and were further alienated by serious military abuse.⁴³⁹

In addition, in the immediate aftermath of the capture of power by the NRA, there was a general anti-northerners sentiment in the country. People from northern Uganda were collectively labeled “ANYANYA”; a derogatory term to imply that they (Acholi and Langi) are not Ugandans but southern Sudanese who have no legitimate right to play a role in Ugandan national life. Thus, Dennis Pain observed, “with the NRA takeover, a new community witch hunt burst out in which every Acholi was pointed out by children and adults as “Anyanya”.⁴⁴⁰ The leaders did not help the situation either. President Museveni worsened matters by referring to the past leaders as “swine” “criminals” or “brutes” and the Acholi soldiers as “Bacholi murderers”. All atrocities committed in Luwero were allegedly by the “Bacholi”.⁴⁴¹

Instead of seeking reconciliation for the sake of peace, the NRA leaders castigated the Acholi in general for the mistakes committed by politicians and a few Acholi soldiers. Worse still, all killings believed to have been committed by

⁴³⁹ Michael Obalatum-a former UPA rebel in Kumi had been a teacher in Ngora until forced to flee into the bush by threats of NRA. Interviewed 2007, Oct. 10

⁴⁴⁰ P. Dennis, “Ethnicity in Small Town”, Paper presented to East African Universities Social Science Council Conference, Nairobi, Dec. 1972, 98

⁴⁴¹ For long, President Museveni has referred to ‘Bacholi and Langi as “problems of Uganda”. For more, see *The Monitor Newspaper* 1987, 1990. Also the President’s speeches in Y. K. Museveni, *What are Africa’s Problems?* (Kampala: NRM Publications, 1992). He kept referring to past leaders like Obote, Tito Okello from the north as criminals, swine (pigs). Such derogatory remarks were not reconciliatory. ‘Bacholi’ is a collective local terminology for all Acholi irrespective of whether they were soldiers or civilians or children.

the Acholi in Luwero during the wartime could not be proved. This kind of representation promoted hatred between the Baganda in Luwero and the Acholi and also spread fear among the ex-soldiers. Most of them, therefore, went to the bush to fight the NRA government.

The behaviour of the victorious NRA forces in Acholiland worsened the situation. NRA commanders in Acholiland acted brutally, thereby justifying fears among the people there that it was time for revenge by southerners against the northerners. Rebel suspects and alleged collaborators were randomly arrested and openly mistreated. This made many ex-soldiers fear to surrender. The significance of NRA atrocities was confirmed by Charles Alai, until 1998 a Deputy Minister in the NRM government and former UPDA fighter, who claims that he was beaten up as a suspect by the NRA at his home in Gulu, and had no option but to join the Uganda Peoples Democratic Movement/Army (UPDA) rebels because his life was threatened⁴⁴². Andrew Adimola, a senior politician from Gulu, also claims that Bazilio Okello would have come out of the bush in 1986 had Museveni not insisted that he should be charged as a criminal.⁴⁴³

The point to be made from the above is that, had there been persuasive and a more sensitive handling of the political issue after the fall of Tito Okello, there is a likelihood that the volatile political-military situation in Acholiland would have been avoided or, at least, minimized. However, the victorious political and

⁴⁴² Interview on 13 October, 2007.

⁴⁴³ E.A. Brett, "Neutralizing the Use of Military Force in Uganda", 146.

military leaders then wanted to assert their authority and humiliate the vanquished. This led to conflict in this region that has persisted to-date.

Museveni and his commanders regarded their victory and revolution as a “fundamental change”. President Museveni then wanted a military solution, not only because he saw the different rebel groups as a military or even criminal problem, but also because it would bring him and the National Resistance Movement substantial political capital. As a result, Acholiland became a cradle of different rebel movements. After the UPDA/M signed an agreement in late 1987, with the government, the Holy Spirit Movement under Alice Auma Lakwena came up. Other groups that followed include the Salvation Army of Severino Lukoya, and the Lords Resistance Army that still remains a problem in the north to this date.

For long, Museveni and his commanders disregarded calls for peace talks to resolve the conflicts in Acholiland. Once, Army Commander James Kazini laughed off such a suggestion on the grounds that the Acholi are genetically a war-like people who value war more than peace. As he said, “If anything, it is local Acholi soldiers causing problems. It’s the cultural background of the people here; they are violent, it’s genetic”.⁴⁴⁴

NRM political leaders then regarded conflicts in the area as a local Acholi affair and not an outcome of the country’s history and poor leadership. The war in Acholiland since 1986 has not only been a disaster for Uganda, but it has also

⁴⁴⁴ Quoted in Human Rights Watch, *The Scar of Death; Children Abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1997).

allowed Museveni to maintain an unreformed and corrupt army as a key pillar of his regime. It stands in the way of thorough security sector reform and gives Museveni the arguments with which to resist mounting international pressure to reduce defence spending drastically. It also gives Museveni pretexts to maintain the political status quo by denying the opposition a power base.

In conclusion, what can be said is that, since independence, post-colonial leaders in Uganda identified three problems, namely, poverty, illiteracy and disease as the true enemies of the people. However, none of them has seriously made efforts to deal with these problems. Instead, post-colonial leaders have made serious political and military mistakes that plunged the country into unending conflicts. Since independence in 1962, and especially until 1986, the topmost political office in Uganda has been in the hands of individuals without political courage and who were not able to develop a political philosophy acceptable to the majority of the Ugandan people. The problem has been that the state has always been too closely identified with individuals and these individuals have consistently failed to provide constructive and inspiring leadership. This study contends, therefore, that Uganda's problem is neither diverse ethnicity, its climate or soils or the fact that it was a colonial state, but poor political leadership.

POLITICS, ETHNICITY AND CONFLICT IN UGANDA, ACHOLILAND IN PERSPECTIVE, 1962-1986

The entity called Uganda is a result of a colonial policy that sought to transform a multiple aggregation of different groups of people into a viable political state. Although the British were not successful in forging a national identity, if indeed that was ever their intention, the country remained largely peaceful in the colonial period. While British colonial authorities' policies sowed the seeds of the weeds that overran Uganda after independence, Ugandans themselves must take blame for nurturing rather than uprooting and destroying those weeds. In the post-independence period, ethnic cleavages and conflict have dominated Uganda's politics. The crux of this study's argument is that the conflicts in post-colonial Uganda and Acholiland in particular can be fully understood only as largely a result of divisive politics, characterized by ethnic manipulation and ethnic stereotyping.

Introduction

One of the post-independence political concerns in Uganda is that conflict has been very detrimental to national peace, stability and national unity. Between 1962 and 2006, the country was dogged by civil conflicts and violent change of governments. There is evidence in the country's history to show that all the post-colonial conflicts that Uganda has experienced have taken on an ethnic expression.

The first major conflict after independence in 1962 was the 1966/1967 political crisis that pitted the Baganda, the country's largest ethnic group under King Mutesa II, then also President of Uganda, against Prime Minister Milton Obote, supported by the army. This turned out to be a conflict between northerners and southerners. The 1971 coup by Idi Amin, supported by his Kakwa and Lugbara kinsmen that overthrew Obote, the civil war of 1981-1986 led by Yoweri Museveni, supported by Baganda, Banyankole and Banyarwanda against Obote II government and the insurgency in northern and eastern parts of Uganda between 1987 and 2006 have all had ethnicity as one of the driving factors. In all these conflicts, ethnicity has been manipulated, stereotyped and politicized.

Ethnicity and Politics: A theoretical overview

Ethnicity is neither immutable nor inherently conflictual. However, ethnicity becomes politically important when and where people are mobilized on the basis of objective characteristics such as culture, language, and territory. In this situation, ethnicity becomes an instrumental and destructive feature in a country's politics. As Robert Melson and Howard Wolpe have noted:

Once ethnicity becomes a salient feature in politics, people increase its intensity by adopting ethnic explanations of succeeding events. Ethnicity then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; inspiring competing organizations and scapegoating.⁴⁴⁵

Ethnicity has exercised profound influence in Uganda's politics both in the colonial and post-colonial periods to varying degrees. Every ethnic group within

⁴⁴⁵ R. Melson & H. Wolpe, "Modernization and the Politics of Communalism: A theoretical Perspective", in *American Political Science Review*, 64, 4 (Dec. 1970), 1115-1230.

post-colonial Uganda wants to be recognized and reckoned with in leadership matters and politics, irrespective of the size of its population. Postcolonial political leaders in Uganda have exacerbated the situation by giving more attention to members of their ethnic community than to national issues. As Okalany has noted, “post-colonial leaders in Uganda have tended to promote and focus much attention on members of their ethnic background for top jobs before others are thought of”.⁴⁴⁶

In the case of Uganda, various groups have used ethnicity to obtain and use state power in order to gain access to scarce resources commanded by the state. Such a situation then facilitates the economic and political insubordination of other groups and generates discontent among the disadvantaged ethnic groups against the source of deprivation. Ethnic identities are therefore strengthened and may become the principle of organization and mobilization for rebellion. Brass observes that “by monopolizing access to cabinet posts and top positions in the military and parastatal enterprises, dominant groups stir up ethnic hostilities thereby provoking coups and conflicts”.⁴⁴⁷ The Ugandan case is illustrative of the entrenchment of ethnicity in politics and how ethnicity has led to political conflicts.

⁴⁴⁶ D.H. Okalany, “Ethnicity and the Culture of Eating in Uganda, 1962-1986”, 188.

⁴⁴⁷ P. R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, (New Delhi: Sage Press, 1969), 178.

Ethnicity

Scholars have conceptualized ethnicity differently, especially with regard to two key issues: ethnic formation and the function it plays in society. Primordialists have explained ethnicity as an archaic reality underlying modernity. They perceive ethnic identities largely in terms of their powerful emotional and psychological holds on their membership. As Thomas Spear has put it, “Primordialists attempt to explain ethnicity’s emotional power through evoking a common history, culture and destiny potentially symbolized by blood in defense of group interests”.⁴⁴⁸ Primordialists like Thomas Spear, Edward Skills and Clifford Geertz assume that ethnicity are a historical artifact or that it does not change.⁴⁴⁹ In spite of the revolutionary nature of historical change in the context of modernity, primordialists are of the view that ethnic identities are inevitable and, therefore, present in modern states.

This is not true, as ethnicity is not static and remains vibrant even in modern-day situations. In modern-day situations of scarce resources, ethnicity is ethnic consciousness ‘acted out’ in relations with others, whether individuals or groups, to maximize gains in situations of conflicting interests and claims over scarce resources, namely, values, statuses, and/or goods. In addition, primordialists also ignore how “tribes” have usually been modern constructions through colonial invention, which froze the inter-play of identities.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁸ S. Thomas, “Neo-Traditionalism and the limits of Invention in British Colonial African” 1- 27: 17. See also E. Skills, “Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil ties”, in *British Journal of Sociology*, 7, 2003 113-45 and for more details see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

⁴⁴⁹ Edward Skills, “Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil ties”, *British Journal of Sociology*, 7 (1957), 113-45.

⁴⁵⁰ P.J. Nederveen, “Deconstructing/ Reconstructing Ethnicity: A Paper presented at a workshop on Ethnicity and the State in East Africa, (OSSREA: Addis-Ababa, June 1996), 3-5.

The second area of contention concerns the notion of the construction or “invented” nature of ethnicity.⁴⁵¹ Scholars have argued out that ethnic identities are social constructs defined by historical conditions. In this case, since ethnicity is a construction, it is amenable to deconstruction. These scholars respect the view that ethnicity is not static and is constructed depending on historical circumstances.

The other important feature of ethnicity which impacts on this study is the function it plays in contemporary society, especially in the field of politics. J. Hutchinson and A. Smith⁴⁵² present the theory of the instrumentalism of ethnicity. According to them, ethnicity is mainly a political weapon or currency which people and especially political leaders find convenient to mobilize for selfish goals. In a sense, ethnic identity is a political resource just like money, and/or votes. Similarly, other instrumentalists like Michael Banton and Michael Hochter⁴⁵³ argue that ethnic identities are not inherent in group or social formations. They see ethnic identities as social capital brought to bear on the political negotiation table by different groups at different times. This is in line with J. Hutchinson and Smith’s position as stated above. The selfish goods or goals for which ethnic identities are used as vehicles to achieve are measured in terms of wealth, power and status. Joining ethnic or national communities

⁴⁵¹ For detailed study See T. Ranger (Ed.), “The Invention of Traditional”, in Ranger T. and Hobsbawn .E. (Eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 234-334.

⁴⁵² J. Hutchinson. & A. Smith, Have propounded in-depth the function ethnicity plays in contemporary society or how it acts as a weapon”. See J. Hutchinson & A. Smith, *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 8.

⁴⁵³ Others like M. Banton, “Modelling Ethnic and National Relations”, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 17, 1994, 2-19 and Michael Hochter, “Explaining Nationalist Violence”, *Nations and Nationalism*, I (1995), 53-68 contend that Ethnicity identities are today used as social capital for political negotiations.

helps to secure these ends either by influencing the state or in certain situations through secession.

Using the above context, the ongoing conflict in Acholiland in northern Uganda must be seen as an effort by Acholi political elites to change the political leadership in Uganda, not through the ballot but the gun. Seen in this light and despite primordialists' claims to the contrary, ethnicity lacks boundaries. Given that politics generally involves the process of distribution and re-distribution of scarce economic resources on the basis of values, political actors are adept at using different strategies, including ethnic affinities to their advantage. In that respect and consistent with the claims of this paper, ethnicity is not necessarily conflictual. Rather, ethnicity is always politicized and manipulated in the competition for goods and services as is evident in many African countries, including Uganda

In the political arena of most countries of Africa where ethnicity is politicized to the extent that it serves as a principle for capturing political power, it has often culminated in political conflicts or civil wars. Countries like Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia and Uganda are notoriously plagued with problems of ethnicity. Hence, their people have continued to experience political instability. As Michael Olisa has noted,

If ethnicity can be formulated as an explanatory theory of an internal conflict, the theory is that unarmed or armed conflict will explode over time where two or more ethnic groups constituting a territorial sovereign state live in mutual suspicion or distrust arising from prolonged perceived or

actual monopoly of political power by one or more such groups and exclusion of others from such power.⁴⁵⁴

Politics

Chabal and Daloz contend that in Africa, the boundaries of politics contrast significantly from those prevailing in Western political systems. Whereas politics in the West is predicated on a well-defined separation between the political realm, on the one hand, and the more economic, social, religious and cultural areas, on the other, this is clearly not the case in Africa.⁴⁵⁵ While it is true that politics is about allocation of resources, in Africa, including Uganda, the boundaries of politics are porous to the extent that it is expected that politics will lead to personal enrichment of the political leader and members of his ethnic group just like it is expected that wealth will have a direct influence on political matters. Significantly, therefore, there has not emerged in Africa the kind of differentiated political realm which is the foundation of politics in the West. Consequently, as each leader came into power, as Okalany notes, the members of that particular ethnic group would rejoice saying “It is our turn to eat” or “we have fallen into things”. Indeed, key positions in government and other departments are dished out first to “tribesmen” before the other ethnic groups are remembered.⁴⁵⁶

We, therefore, argue that Uganda’s instability and conflict is a function of a negative polarized imbalance of socio-political forces in which groups dictate

⁴⁵⁴ M. Olisa, “Standing on Sinking Sand: Ecomog and the Liberian Conflict”, in P. Anyang-Nyong (Ed.), *Arms and Dagger in the Heart of Africa: Studies in Internal Conflict*, (Nairobi: Academy Science Publishers, 1993), 269.

⁴⁵⁵ P. Chabal & J.P. Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*, (Oxford & Bloomington: the International African Institute/James Currey/Indian University Press, 1999), 26.

⁴⁵⁶ D.H. Okalany, “Ethnicity and the Culture of Eating in Uganda”, 188.

political terms only acceptable to themselves. This state of political affairs, in turn, generates reaction from temporarily marginalized ethnic groups who seek, using political or any other resources available to them, to overthrow the established political order. This then leads to frequent conflicts. Conflict in post-independence Acholiland draws its roots from such politics.

Colonialism and the construction of ethnicity

Once the British colonialists established the multi-ethnic state of Uganda, they made no efforts to forge its inhabitants into a unified and viable political entity. In the 68 years of uninterrupted colonial rule, the British halted and froze the natural process of historical evolution in Uganda. As J. Mugaju notes, the process of cultural diffusion through trade, intermarriage and migration was disrupted partly because the British then emphasized the differences and prejudices rather than the similarities between the people of Uganda. British policy of “divide and rule” enhanced the spirit of ethnic consciousness and chauvinism which became a source of tension and conflict in post-colonial Uganda.⁴⁵⁷ Uganda’s post-colonial leaders simply perpetuated this process of ethnic incompatibility started by the British.

The thrust of British colonial policy before 1945 was to keep Africans apart and to promote disunity, ethnicity and parochialism. The British implemented this policy through the system of indirect rule. Indirect rule was justified mainly on the argument that it would be cheaper to permit traditional authorities to carry out administrative tasks under British supervision than to have British officers

⁴⁵⁷ J. Mugaju (Ed), *Uganda’s Age of Reform: A Critical Overview*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1999), 12.

do so themselves.⁴⁵⁸ The indirect rule system simply enhanced ethnic identification.

In conformity with the politics of 'divide and rule', the British colonial authorities did not establish a uniform system of administration over the whole protectorate. In Buganda, the British found and used a well organized traditional state on a relatively large scale. Having allied with the Baganda in the military expedition against the Banyoro under Kabalega in 1899, they negotiated a treaty with important Baganda chiefs. The Buganda Agreement of 1900 rewarded the chiefs with grants of freehold land (contrary to traditional custom) and rewarded the Baganda generally by giving them administrative control over large areas of land taken from the defeated Bunyoro.⁴⁵⁹ The 'agreement' guaranteed the position of the Kabaka and introduced a modified version of a traditional Baganda hierarchy of chiefs, acting under the supervision of British officers. This treaty was central to the development of Buganda separatism since it gave them the feeling that they were equal to the British.⁴⁶⁰ The British then used Baganda agents to conquer the rest of Uganda and to establish an effective colonial administration.

However, by treating Buganda as a 'state within a state', the British created seeds of ethnic tension and conflict in Uganda. The Baganda developed a high

⁴⁵⁸ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 96.

⁴⁵⁹ The counties Bunyoro lost to Buganda included Buyaga and Bugangaizi. These became known in Uganda's history as "lost counties" and were the burial grounds for Bunyoro Kings. This became an issue of political dissent and enmity between Buganda and Bunyoro in the post-colonial period which leaders continued to exploit at different times.

⁴⁶⁰ P. R. Cranford, "The Politics of Indirect Rule: Uganda, 1900-1955" in D. Anthony Low and R. Cranford Pratt (Eds.), *Buganda and British Overrule, 1900-1955: Two Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 178.

sense of ethnic nationalism and this was reinforced by their economic and political centrality in Uganda. Other parts of Uganda were then considered by the British as ‘satellites’ of Buganda. This has since led to anti-Baganda sentiments in the rest of Uganda.

The British then set out to introduce a pattern of rule over what they perceived as the “rest of the tribes” of Uganda, and that rule reflected aspects of their relationship with the Baganda. They recognised the three Kingdoms of Ankole, Bunyoro and Toro as areas for reconstruction. Consequently, they expanded the kingdom of Ankole to include some smaller kingdoms to the west like Buhweju and Mpororo. The British also expanded Toro as a buffer to Bunyoro, while they reduced Bunyoro in size as punishment for its rebellion against British colonialism.⁴⁶¹ This means that none of the kingdoms corresponded exactly to the areas under their influence in the pre-colonial period. The most noticeable feature with this new adjustment was that the ethnic interest of areas expanded into was not taken care of, leading to increased ethnic tension among the different ethnic units in Uganda.

Besides, the British sent a Muganda collaborator and an important chief-Semei Kakungulu to Busoga to “weld scattered chiefdoms into a tribal organization,”⁴⁶² and also to Teso and Bukedi in eastern Uganda. Baganda agents went to Lango in northern Uganda and Kigezi in western Uganda as well. In these areas, Baganda agents were used to rule people who had no history of hierarchical

⁴⁶¹ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 98.

⁴⁶² H. B. Thomas & Scott, *Uganda*, 9.

rule. The Baganda agents were, thus, sent out to establish hierarchical chiefly rule in such areas which had no tradition of hierarchy like Teso, Kigezi and Lango. Therefore, while Buganda retained its own system of government, other parts of Uganda had their systems destroyed. This use of Baganda agents was to become a problem later leading to conflict between Baganda agents and the immediate post-independence government under Prime Minister Obote. It also partly explains why during the 1950s and 1960s, the ambitions of Buganda nationalism clashed with the integrative policies of the central government.

The Uganda version of indirect rule significantly contributed to the growth of ethnic identification. Most importantly, it sanctioned the notion that the existence of an ethnic unit was a valid basis for an administrative unit. At the same time, British policy increased the frustration of ethnic units which had lost territory or traditional office bearers then replaced by Baganda agents. By using Baganda agents and by giving Baganda a degree of self-government denied all other Kingdoms and districts, the British contributed to the resentment other people felt for the Baganda and to their growing awareness that only by demonstrating a cultural unity approximating that of the Baganda could they get similar concessions from the British. This belief survived the colonial period, leading to a situation of competitive demands on the central government by different ethnic or tribal groups. For instance, the frequent demand for districts today by almost each ethnic group is testimony to the above.

Besides, the other important element that entrenched ethnicity in the body politic of Uganda were the arbitrary territorial colonial boundaries among cultural and linguistic aggregates, which eliminated the fluid situation typical of the earlier period. One important reason for drawing district and county boundaries in accordance with cultural and linguistic aggregates was to simplify the task of keeping law and order for colonial officers.

The 1949 Local Government Ordinance and other subsequent Acts determined that the district (or kingdom) would be the basic local government unit. The new Ordinance of 1949 gave corporate powers and responsibilities to the district councils of those areas where no agreements had been signed. This Ordinance even spelt out clearly that districts were to be composed of one tribe. In the process of determining district boundaries, much care was taken to include wherever possible and practical, one ethnic group in one district. These district councils discussed and dealt with issues which affected their population only; hence promoting ethnic rather than national loyalties.

In the 1950s, the colonial policy based on tribes led Governor Cohen to suggest that African members of the Legislative Council should be elected by district councils because “abler representatives would likely be chosen, since it is the district which is the natural unit of public life everywhere outside Buganda: and where tribal loyalty and cohesion is strong.”⁴⁶³

⁴⁶³ For details on this see “Correspondence Relating to the legislative council in Uganda”, quoted in D. Apter. *The Political kingdom, in Uganda: A Study of Bureaucratic Nationalism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 272.

In 1958, the district was made the constituency in those areas in which representatives were to be elected. By necessity, the district also later became the 'natural unit' for organization of political parties on the eve of independence; with the result that political parties in independent Uganda tended to follow ethnic categorization of the country.

In this new administrative re-arrangement, Buganda again led the way. In the 1955 Agreement, which reflected the 1900 treaty, the central government's control over the Buganda government was greatly reduced. Buganda, for example, gained the right to select its chiefs and other officers through its own Appointment Board. It also could introduce government by ministers on the pattern of the English National government. Baganda civil servants, who had been posted to other districts, returned to take up newly created positions in the Kabaka's government. In this way, "tribalism and local service appointment were brought together as never before".⁴⁶⁴

The other kingdoms and districts were anxious to acquire the same governmental structure and autonomy. As Leys put it, "both the colonial administration and non-Baganda political leaders (saw) political development then in terms of building up their own kingdom and district administrations to comparable level of competence and vigour".⁴⁶⁵ Since competition with Buganda was, by definition, ethnic, the rivalry stimulated the entry of ethnicity

⁴⁶⁴ D. Apter, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda*, 362.

⁴⁶⁵ C. Leys, *Politicians and Policies: An Essay on Politics in Acholi, Uganda*, 9-10.

into politics. In the period towards independence, each district struggled to achieve “federal status” and a “constitutional head”, as Buganda had.

Regional disparities and conflict in Uganda

Economic distortions compounded the problem of ethnicity during the colonial period. British colonialism created regional imbalances and ethnic specialization. Southern and, to some extent, eastern Uganda became regions of peasant producers of cotton and coffee. These cash crops were augmented by foreign owned tea and sugar plantations as well as trade and import substitution industries. Other areas, such as Kigezi, Ankole and West Nile, became labour reservoirs for the monetary sector of the colonial economy. Acholi, Teso, Lango and, to some extent, West Nile became catchment areas for the armed forces and police. The British were happy to leave Karamoja as “a human zoo” for posterity.⁴⁶⁶ Cash crop production was officially discouraged in northern Uganda and West Nile because it would negatively affect the labour flow to the south. The result of this ‘division of labour’ was the building of ethnic cleavages that would entrench ethnic consciousness in the country in the long run. Therefore, through ‘divide and rule’ tactics, one region was pitted against another and one nationality (tribe) against another. As Mamdani, has summed it up,

Every institution touched by the hand of the colonial state was given a pronounced regional or nationality character. It became a truism that a soldier must be a northerner, a civil servant a southerner, and a merchant an Asian.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁶ J. Mugaju (Ed.), *Uganda’s Age of Reform*, 15.

⁴⁶⁷ M. Mamdani, *Imperialism and Fascism in Uganda* 10.

These distortions proved troublesome for the rulers of independent Uganda. As a result of the assignment given to the north (of providing soldiers and policemen), in the post-colonial period, the ruling elite from this region was quick to exploit this military predominance to acquire and retain power undemocratically. The regional inequality that resulted from this policy also helped to crystallize ethnic consciousness in post-colonial Uganda.

Discrepancies in regional and, therefore, ethnic development and wealth characteristic of Uganda have produced antagonisms that have often led to violence, either directly or indirectly. The greatest, and most problematic disparity created by the colonial power, the British, and sustained by post-colonial leaders was precisely between the centre-Buganda and the rest of the country or, geographically, between the North and South.

In Uganda, as in many other African countries, the spread of new social and economic influences radiates out from the capital city.⁴⁶⁸ Kampala and Entebbe, both in Buganda, were the focus of colonial influence, since it was there that Captain, later Lord; Lugard established the first permanent military presence. Most Ugandans are deeply aware that, to a large extent, the Baganda owe their prominent position to this fortuitous historical event.

⁴⁶⁸ If one follows up the historical pattern of establishing modern facilities like post office, roads, railways, one finds that the nearer a 'location is to Kampala, the higher the possibility of it obtaining modern facilities like post offices and banks.

Socially, the British colonial administration considered the Baganda as superior to other ethnic groups in the Protectorate⁴⁶⁹ and it was, in effect, by extending Buganda rule that the rest of Uganda was consolidated. As the process of ethnification intensified, as Mamdani notes, “the Buganda kingdom impressed its future colonialists and came to represent the most developed example of a centralized model”.⁴⁷⁰ With time, the Acholi society was to represent the stereotyped other. Buganda’s political institutions were exported to the rest of the country. The Baganda were used as partners in the conquest of Uganda and later as sub-imperialist agents. Such moves were bound to upset other Ugandans, feed anti-Baganda sentiments, and encourage other ethnic groups to unite against the Baganda.⁴⁷¹

Buganda was not only the nucleus from which European expansion to the rest of Uganda radiated, but it also received early benefits in the fields of education, medical services and communication networks, among others. Because of its proximity to the administrative centres of Kampala and Entebbe, Buganda gained more from the multiplier effect of government development initiatives than the isolated regions of the protectorate, such as the Northern Province. When cash crops, starting with cotton, were introduced in 1903, Buganda was the first region selected for experimentation.⁴⁷² The production of these cash crops was based on both peasant and migrant labour mainly drawn from the North, West Nile, Kigezi and Rwanda. In the north, principally Acholi and

⁴⁶⁹ M. Twaddle, *The Expulsion of a Minority: Essays on Ugandan Asians*, (London: Heinemann, 1975), 303.

⁴⁷⁰ M. Mahmood, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*, 28.

⁴⁷¹ Ethnic nationalism tended to develop and deepen from this kind of political process. For instance the Bagisu and Banyoro who were ruled by Baganda sub-imperialists consolidated as a ‘tribes’ partly in opposition to Buganda agents.

⁴⁷² A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 51.

Lango, the colonialists recruited soldiers and policemen, as well as labourers, for factories and plantations in the South.⁴⁷³

While other areas, including the Eastern Province, began to grow cash crops on a notable scale in the 1950s, it was noted that “one of the principal developments since the World War II has been the concentration of agricultural wealth in certain areas of the protectorate and especially Buganda”.⁴⁷⁴ This regional concentration of agricultural wealth means that Baganda peasants were richer than others despite the official appropriation of their surplus. Therefore, through divide and rule tactics, one region was pitted against another and one ethnic group against another.

During the colonial period, bursaries were accorded to pupils who excelled to enable them attain higher educational grades. In parts of Buganda, non-Baganda were officially segregated from the scheme. Christine Obbo explains how children of immigrants into Mukono in Buganda could not access such scholarships. She quotes a former teacher of a prominent secondary school, who stated:

In all my classes, the non-Baganda children were hard working and often achieved top grades even in Luganda (language of Buganda). Every time I recommended any of these children whom the fellowships are meant to reward, none of them ever received any. The headmaster always managed to reward the academically poor pupils just because they happened to be his children or those of his Baganda friends and relatives.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷³ M. Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*, 10.

⁴⁷⁴ C. C. Wrigley, *Crops and Wealth in Uganda*, 69-80.

⁴⁷⁵ C. Obbo, “What Went Wrong in Uganda?”, in H. Holger Bernt & M. Twaddle (Eds.), *Uganda Now*, (London: James Currey, 1988), 208.

Such ethnic segregation through education enabled Baganda to forge ahead of other districts and tribes.

Moreover, most of the social infrastructure such as schools and hospitals was also concentrated in Buganda. In a country with an enormous income gap between peasant farmer and civil servant, the importance of gaining a place in secondary school and in university can scarcely be underestimated. Until independence in 1962, the Baganda filled a disproportionate number in secondary school places. For instance in 1920, Baganda had 368 schools, Western and Eastern Provinces had 42 each and there was none in Northern Uganda.⁴⁷⁶ On the eve of independence in 1960, Baganda filled 29 percent of the secondary school places available, while Acholi had 7.1 percent, Lango, 6.5 percent and Japadhola had 1.4 percent. This is despite the fact that, according to the 1959 population census, Baganda constituted a mere 16.3 percent of a total population of 11 million people.⁴⁷⁷

Buganda's overrepresentation continued even at Makerere University College; the only university in East Africa during the colonial period. Considering that university degrees were the gateway to the most powerful positions and greatest economic opportunities, the fact that 40 percent of the 1698 persons who entered Makerere before 1954 from all parts of East Africa were Baganda explains much of their predominance on the eve of independence.⁴⁷⁸ Although the Baganda's overrepresentation has dropped, they still provide a large percent

⁴⁷⁶ T. Kabwegyere, *The Politics of State Formation in Uganda*, 179.

⁴⁷⁷ Government of Uganda, *Uganda Census: Annual Report of the Education Department*, (1961), 27-28

⁴⁷⁸ J. E. Goldthorpe, *An African Elite: Makerere College Students, 1922-1960*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 24.

of university entrants today. In the colonial period, government policy was carefully tailored to promote and protect the position of Buganda in Uganda, since, according to the British, Buganda had not exhibited any social resistance to central authority.⁴⁷⁹

Economic transformation in the field of industrial development in the colonial period still favoured the Baganda at the expense of other ethnic groups. When the capital city Kampala - already offering many central government jobs - attracted industry, the Baganda were more available to take up wage employment. This enabled them to be more stable employees and advance more rapidly into skilled position.⁴⁸⁰

On the contrary, areas like Acholiland did not easily benefit from such opportunities except when their children migrated South in search of paid jobs. By 1963, there was no industry in Acholi, except the two cotton ginneries owned by the West and East Acholi co-operative unions. The Acholi trading sector, by 1963, consisted of 556 traders, of whom 445 were Africans. A year later, the number of African traders had risen to 507.⁴⁸¹ In other words, apart from a few Asian traders in Gulu and Kitgum, trade was still mainly an affair of tiny village stores.

⁴⁷⁹ In his praise of the Baganda as agents in the implementation of Indirect rule, Lord Lugard strongly believed so. Quoted in Apter David, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda: A Study of Bureaucratic Nationalisms*, (Princeton; Princeton University Press 1967), 366.

⁴⁸⁰ Fallers Lloyd, *Bantu Bureaucracy: A Century of Political Evolution among the Basoga of Uganda* (Chicago: University Press, 1965), 148.

⁴⁸¹ C. Leys, *Politicians and Policies: An Essay on Politics in Acholi*, 15.

Translated into political terms, this regional imbalance generated a psycho-chronic sense of grievance among the “deprived” and a psycho-chronic sense of possessiveness among the disadvantaged. The sense of regional deprivation was always reflected in the Parliamentary speeches of the Northern leadership. Such was the economic plight of the Acholi soon after independence in 1962 that Alexander Latin, the area member of Parliament, introduced a motion urging the Uganda Development Co-operation to establish cattle ranches in Acholi. As he strongly stated:

Acholi District is poor. It has remained poor for a long time for various reasons. It is far away from the cattle trade and money circulation. There is lack of employment in the district. This has been illustrated in many ways. In the past, we did get a lot of people coming down here (Buganda) in search of work. Most of them go back worse than when they came and this did not help them very much...Acholi District is one of those areas in Uganda which has lagged behind economically.⁴⁸²

Another member of Parliament, Okello voiced the same grievance about the situation in West Nile (Part of Northern Province) when he asserted:

What I know, [all] the government (both colonial and post-colonial) does think about West Nile is to keep it a human zoo, and get cheap labourers from it, to work in places like Kakira, to work in Kawolo (both sugar plantations) and in places where new industries will be started-because I do believe that government does think that if one, two or more industries are started in West Nile, the flow of labour from that ‘district to other districts will be stopped.⁴⁸³

This sense of possessiveness in the expression of ethnic nationalism continued into the post-colonial period and partly explains why the Acholi army officers organized a coup against a fellow northerner, Obote, in 1985 and was part of

⁴⁸² Uganda Parliamentary Debates, *Hansard*, 20., 284-285

⁴⁸³ Uganda Parliamentary Debates, *Hansard*, 35, 3135-3136

the many reasons Idi Amin advanced to justify his military takeover in 1971; again overthrowing Obote, a Langi from the north.

The general country employment statistics in 1967 showed how Buganda was ahead of other regions. Also in 1967, out of the registered employees, 109,800 were in Buganda, 58,800 in the Eastern Province, 53,300 in Western Province and 20,000 in Northern Province (Acholi, Lango and West Nile combined).⁴⁸⁴

With time, members of other ethnic groups became acutely conscious that they had to become 'strangers' in the home of the Baganda to earn high incomes. They resented the fact that the development of their schools and hospitals lagged behind those in Buganda. They watched the Baganda consolidate their numerical advantage by becoming the educational and economic elite as well. By demanding a share of the benefits of development equal to that of the Baganda, the disadvantaged 'tribes' intensified the ethnic basis of Ugandan politics. The Baganda were only out competed in the police and Army where the Acholi and Langi were dominant.

Even though Buganda's greater wealth created frustration among the Acholi, Langi and West Nilers who were their labourers, the same differential modernization process under colonial rule also created resentment in other districts and kingdoms. The case of the Bakonzo and Bamba in Western Uganda; and Bagisu-Sebei in Eastern Uganda illustrates this.

⁴⁸⁴ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 51-148.

The Bakonzo and Bamba, put under the Toro Kingdom by the colonialists, found themselves disadvantaged in the number of schools, medical facilities, dispensaries and positions in the district administration in comparison to the Batoro under whose rule the British had forcefully placed them. Soon after independence, the Bamba/Bakonjo resentment against Toro Kingdom culminated in the Rwenzururu Movement against both the central government and the Batoro.

Similarly in Eastern Uganda, the Sebei-Bugisu merger negatively affected Sebei who lost land to the more densely populated Bagisu in the lowlands which traditionally belonged to the Sebei. By 1962, the Bagisu were producing twice as much of the coffee marketed in Sebei as the Sebei themselves.⁴⁸⁵ In the course of time, the Sebei, like the Bakonzo-Bamba, strengthened their ethnic demands for separate districts partly because of such economic inequalities.

As Kasfir has rightly noted, differential modernization might not have had such serious ethnic consequences if colonial policies of indirect rule, administration, education, courts and local government had not conditioned Ugandans to think in ethnic terms.⁴⁸⁶ However, given the structure of resource allocation and the fluidity of politics in Africa, Uganda included, feelings of ethnic deprivation became a potent source of political participation. The struggle for political power has therefore been common largely due to the need to use the state to

⁴⁸⁵ M. Twaddle, "Tribalism in Eastern Uganda", in P. H Gulliver (Ed.), *Tradition and Transition in East Africa, Studies of the Tribal Element in the Modern Era*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 345.

⁴⁸⁶ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 113.

access economic resources which are always scarce. Political elites in Uganda have always used their ethnic constituencies to achieve this.

With their high incomes and other economic advantages, the Baganda then developed sophisticated tastes. As Elkan pointed out,

Everybody (in Uganda) needs money to pay their poll-tax, and in most areas there is a sale of 'cloth, cigarettes, soap and bicycles. In Buganda, there is also a sale for refrigerators,' motorcars and dinner jackets.⁴⁸⁷

The Baganda came to realize that they were more prosperous than the other inhabitants of the country.⁴⁸⁸ They became arrogant to the extent that in 1930, they were described as having "translated the old sense of superiority into the idea that skilled labour is the sphere of Baganda and unskilled work that of other tribes".⁴⁸⁹

The arrogance and economic advantages of the Baganda made them unpopular with other Ugandans. Little did they realize that, in two crucial areas, the army and police, the British had disadvantaged them. The colonial regime had, in pursuit of the strategy of "divide and rule", armed the economically disadvantaged Acholi, Langi and other Sudanic speakers and demilitarized the more privileged Baganda. When Milton Obote took power after independence in 1962 as executive Prime Minister, he not only continued army recruitment from his fellow northerners, but also turned guns against the Baganda in the 'famous' 1966 crisis. Since the balance of power in underdeveloped countries

⁴⁸⁷ E. Walter, *The Economic Development of Uganda*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 112.

⁴⁸⁸ R. Audrey, "Traditional Values and Current Political Behaviour", in Lloyd Fallers (Ed.), *The Kings Men: Leadership and Status in Buganda on the Eve of Independence*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 294.

⁴⁸⁹ L. Mair, "Local Government in Busoga", in *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 5, .2 (1967), 11.

like Uganda has continued to lie more with coercive elements than with those who own the means of production, under-representation of the Baganda and other Bantu ethnic groups in Uganda's armed forces up to 1986 created a dangerous imbalance for them.⁴⁹⁰

In the December 1980 elections for president and members of Parliament, Milton Obote could tellingly ask his rival Paul Semwogerere of the Democratic party and Yoweri Museveni of the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM), who happened to come from the South and West of the country, respectively, where their armies were and, if they did not have them, how they hoped to take power. Consequently, to Obote and his ethnic army, the ballot was irrelevant. This kind of thinking and practice explains the history of conflicts that has become associated with post-colonial Uganda.

Religious sectarianism was another source of instability in post-colonial Uganda. The introduction of Islam in the 1840s and Christianity in the late 1870s left Uganda divided into several religious factions. These factions soon became entangled in politics. In the 1880s there was what Mugaju described as a "Christian Revolution". This revolution, involving in-fighting between the Protestants and Catholics, led to the overthrow of the traditional power of the Kabaka (King) of Buganda, paving the way for the ascendance of Protestants in the politics of Buganda and Uganda at the expense of the Catholics.⁴⁹¹ Throughout the colonial period, the Protestants (or Anglicans) became the 'de

⁴⁹⁰ For a detailed analysis of politics and military in Uganda see classical work by Amii Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890-1985*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1987), and A. Mazrui, *Soldiers and Kinsmen in Uganda: The Making of a Military Ethnocracy*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1976).

⁴⁹¹ J. Mugaju, *Uganda's Age of Reform*, 15.

facto' established church in Uganda. Protestants exploited this to dominate the colonial administration and local government. Muslims and Catholics were, henceforth, marginalized. This religious polarization continued as a strong factor in the struggle for independence, beginning in the 1950s with the formation of political parties. Political parties like the Democratic Party (DP) and the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) were formed along such religious lines. This added a new level of polarisation in Uganda, in addition to their ethnic leaning.

Political parties and ethnicity in Uganda

Wallerstein argues that “the most important mechanism to reduce the conflict between ethnicity and national integration is the national party”.⁴⁹² In the case of Uganda, the opposite is true. Ugandan political parties, instead, exacerbated ethnic political participation. A brief analysis of the formation and nature of the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC), the Uganda National Congress (UNC), Kabaka Yekka (KY) and the Democratic Party (DP) as the main political actors up to 1966 will help to illustrate this concern. None of the above- mentioned political parties developed national central organizations. Instead, they were oriented toward district politics and vulnerable to the appeals of ethnic movements. As Cherry Gertzel has noted of UPC, “the national organization of the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) controlled neither the National Assembly nor policy statements of district branches”.⁴⁹³ Nearly all UPC local party officials were

⁴⁹² I. Wallerstein, “Ethnicity and National Integration”, in Pierre van Berghe (Ed.), *Africa: Problems of Change and Conflict*, (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), 138.

⁴⁹³ C. Gertzel, “How Kabaka Yekka Came to be”, *Africa Report*, 9 (1974), 113.

stationed in the areas of the ethnic units to which they belonged.⁴⁹⁴ The tribal or ethnic link in this party since its formation was even acknowledged by some of its stalwarts. John Kakonge, once the Secretary General of the party, stated: “the basic forces in the formation of the U.P.C were tribal and personal, and its structure was based on a conglomeration of tribes”.⁴⁹⁵

The main challenger to UPC, the Democratic Party (DP), also showed few signs of centralization of power and found it extremely difficult to impose a single approach to strategy, policy, or candidate nominations on branches or members.⁴⁹⁶ The Uganda National Congress (UNC), formed by Ignatius Musaaazi and the predecessor to the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC), made headway only where it was able to take advantage of local issues.⁴⁹⁷ It never developed a specifically national appeal. The Lango branch of the UNC, for example, was run by local notables rather than by the national party officers. In Buganda where its leaders were commoners, it reaped full support from the rural masses but was rejected by the Buganda government to which it posed a fundamental challenge. As one official of the Buganda government remarked,

We disagree with being united (as the UNC seems to suggest), with those territories which have different customs, ways of living and agreements which are entirely different from ours.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁴ J.S. Nye “TANU and UPC: The Impact of Independence on Two African Nationalist Parties” in J. Butler and A. A. Castgno (Eds.), *Boston University Paper on Africa: Transition in Africa Politics*, (New York: Fredrik Praeger, 1965), 23.

⁴⁹⁵ For details on the remark and UPC internal structure see S. Kakonge; “The Political Party, its Structure, Organisation and its Members”, *Challenge of Independence*, (Kampala: The Milton Obote Foundation, 1966), 3.

⁴⁹⁶ D. Rothchild & M. Rogin, “Uganda” in Gwendople M. C. (Ed.), *National Unit and Regionalism in Eight African States* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1966), 390-391.

⁴⁹⁷ D. Apter, “Political Parties and National Integration”, in J. Coleman & G. Roseberg (Eds.), *Tropical Africa*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), 379.

⁴⁹⁸ Quoted in *Uganda Post*, September 25th 1953, *Uganda Herald*, October 24th 1953.

When its leaders felt that the integrity of Buganda was threatened during the crisis over the exile of the Kabaka of Buganda in 1953 by British Governor-Cohen, the UNC abandoned its efforts to gain nationwide following.⁴⁹⁹

Ethnic considerations feature prominently in the failure of Ugandan parties to develop strong national organization and outlook. Besides, in the 1950s, the colonial policy of thinking in terms of tribes worsened the situation. In 1958, the district became the constituency unit in those areas in which representatives were to be elected. By necessity then, the district also became the “natural unit” for organization of the political parties. Benedicto Kiwanuka, leader of the Democratic Party (DP), claimed that in the 1958 elections, the first direct elections to the legislative council, they chose primarily on ‘tribal’ grounds”.⁵⁰⁰

After the 1961 elections that were won by the Democratic Party, the stage was then set for DP-UPC struggle to achieve absolute majority in the National Assembly elections of 1962 since the winning party would form the first independence government. As Kasfir notes, both parties were forced to take up local grievances and accept deviations from the national line. For example, both parties felt constrained to support the demands of Ankole, Bunyoro, Toro and Busoga for full federal status. This meant that such areas would be autonomous (as ethnic units in Independent Uganda).⁵⁰¹ Benedicto Kiwanuka, then the Prime minister and leader of the Democratic Party, further agreed that

⁴⁹⁹ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 114.

⁵⁰⁰ B. George, “Tribalism in Politics”, in Gulliver (Ed.), *Tradition and Transition in East Africa: Studies of the Tribal Element in the Modern Era*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 64.

⁵⁰¹ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 115.

Sebei should have their own district, independent of Bugishu. He also supported the Bemba and Bakonzo demand for autonomous districts away from Toro. The result of such political manipulation was to further legitimize ethnic political participation within the national arena, since the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) had to respond in kind. In 1962, Uganda held another election in preparation for Independence. This election won by the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) was still largely determined by ethnic and religious considerations than national considerations. As proof of this, only nine out of the 185 African candidates were born outside the district in which their constituencies were located.

Indeed, as Godfrey Binaiisa, the UPC Attorney-General, remarked six months after independence: “We (UPC) are not a mass party because most of our Members of Parliament are here for tribal merits”.⁵⁰² The point to emphasize here is that UPC’s victory in 1962 did not only dislodge the Democratic Party (DP) from national office, but it also strengthened the structure of ethnic political participation in Uganda’s politics.

In Tanzania, the coming of independence increased national integration because an alien colonial administration was to be replaced with a local indigenous government. In Uganda, the opposite was true. The departure of the alien government tended to remove the force that had, at least, encouraged unity within the nation-state. With the British gone, each tribe began to think of how resources would be allocated or distributed and how they would stand to benefit

⁵⁰² J. S. Nye, “TANU and UPC” “The Impact of Independence on Two Nationalist Parties”, 231.

rather than uniting as Ugandans. One result in Uganda was an increased willingness to regard ministers and senior civil servants “as representatives of their respective tribes, whose function in government was to safeguard and plead tribal interests in matters of appointments, distribution of development projects and social services”.⁵⁰³

Besides, the coming of independence in Uganda also aroused fears of future ill-treatment and an upsurge of political activity among smaller ethnic units. In Bunyoro, for instance, the “Lost Counties” issue, which was about whether the counties surrendered by Bunyoro to Buganda (Buyaga and Bugangazi) should be returned, produced agitated pronouncements and desperate maneuvers that resulted in violence and arson. In Eastern Uganda, Sebei “nationalists” also organized their followers behind the demand for a separate district instead of being part of Bugisu/Mbale district. Similarly, at the same time, Bamba and Bakonzo leaders also began to demand entrenched constitutional protection from the Batoro, and when they failed to get it, they converted the cultural thrust of the Rwenzururu movement into a political weapon. In the north, the Acholi from the eastern part demanded a separate district, and even tabled a motion in Parliament in October 1963 on this issue, but the proposal was defeated.⁵⁰⁴

Other smaller ethnic groups like the Bahororo living in Ankole and the Iteso of Bukedi in Eastern Uganda also demanded separate districts.⁵⁰⁵ This increased

⁵⁰³ A. M. Obote, “The Footsteps of Uganda’s Revolution”, *East African Journal*, 5, 10 (1968), 7.

⁵⁰⁴ C. Leys, *Politicians and Policies*, 6.

⁵⁰⁵ D. Rothchild & M. Rogin, “Uganda”, 413.

demand for districts based on ethnic demarcations became a pronounced feature in Uganda's post-independence politics. It justifies the argument that in the colonial and later post-colonial periods, ethnic political participation seemed to provide some protection against an uncertain future.

The above analysis illustrates how the colonial construction of power led to the institutionalization of ethnicity in Uganda's body politic. As Mamdani observes,

Everywhere, the local apparatus of the colonial state was organized either ethnically or on a religious basis. This is why one finds it difficult to recall a single major peasant uprising over the colonial period that has not been either ethnic or religious in inspiration.⁵⁰⁶

Whereas this contradictory tendency of ethnicity had led to the creation of Uganda in 1962, post-colonial practices by the mainstream nationalists who took charge of the state exacerbated ethnicity in the country's body politic.

Ethnicity and Politics in the Post-colonial period

British colonialism sowed the seeds but did not reap the fruits of sectarianism, regionalism and authoritarianism. However, though the legacies of colonialism were difficult enough, they were not insurmountable. It was only unfortunate that the inheritors of the colonial state pursued short-term and self-centered policies which made the situation worse. Instead of correcting mistakes of colonialism, post-colonial practices by the mainstream nationalists saw the reproduction, rather than the destruction, of ethnicity in Uganda's body politics. The reforms adopted by the political leadership that inherited the central state

⁵⁰⁶ M. Mamdani, "Historicising Power and Responses to Power: Indirect Rule and its Reform", *Social Research*, 66, 3, (1999), 17-18.

apparatus were limited as far as the deconstruction of the political base of ethnic consciousness, restructuring the economy to diffuse the ethnic and regional material expression and the liberation of civil society were concerned.⁵⁰⁷

The nation-state and ethnicity (political developments towards independence)

On October 1962, Uganda achieved independence from Britain and became a republic, replacing the White Governor General Sir Andrew Cohen with an African president, Sir Edward Mutesa II, a year later. This transfer of power marked the only peaceful change of government in Uganda's history as an independent nation.

Uganda's road to independence was not a simple one. One of the problems that challenged early Uganda nationalists was the position of Buganda in independent Uganda and the person to be head of state when independence finally came. Independence was ushered in by political activities mainly from Buganda because the Baganda had been the first people to receive Western civilization from the colonialists. In 1958, when contesting elections for the Legislative Council (Legco), three political parties emerged in Buganda, namely, the Democratic Party (DP) led by Benedicto Kiwanuka, the Progressive Party (PP) led by E.M.K Mulira, and the Uganda National Congress (UNC) led by Ignatius Musazi and J.W. Kiwanuka. The membership of all these parties was fully

⁵⁰⁷ M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 288-291.

Buganda and its leadership likewise, was dominated by Baganda.⁵⁰⁸ A study carried out in 1958 revealed that, out of thirty persons whose ethnic origin could be identified (using local districts), twenty-five were Baganda; two were from Acholi, and one each came from Busoga, Lango and Toro⁵⁰⁹. This fact did not go down well with the other regions of Uganda, since for a long time they believed that the British favoured the Baganda. When the Uganda National Congress (UNC) weakened, Obote from the north rose to lead its splinter group: the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC).

In the elections of 1961, in preparation for independence, Benedicto Kiwanuka defeated UPC under Obote to become the first Prime Minister. The defeat of Obote intensified ethnic and religious polarization in Uganda. First, the Acholi and Langi felt that the Bantu group that amalgamated in their support to Kiwanuka did so to humiliate and ridicule the northerners.⁵¹⁰

In 1961, representatives from all political parties in Uganda then and representatives of local governments and the Kabaka's (King's) government met at the Lancaster House Conference in London. This conference still gave greater control of government to Buganda. Buganda was to take full control of vital sectors like internal affairs and security, infrastructural developments in the fields of health, school development and transport.⁵¹¹ The implication of this was that while Buganda was held in high esteem, other regions and ethnic

⁵⁰⁸ D.H. Okalany, "Ethnicity and the Culture of Eating in Uganda", 189.

⁵⁰⁹ D. Gugin, "Africanisation of the Ugandan Public Service", PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1967, 127.

⁵¹⁰ Interview with 80-year-old Cuthebert Obwangor, 2007.

⁵¹¹ Interview with 80-year-old Cuthebert Obwangor, 2007.

groups were made to look secondary. This trend of events was to affect the later political developments leading to the deep ethnic divide in Uganda.

The second major problem that emerged on the eve of independence concerned the person to be the Head of State of Independent Uganda. Even when Benedicto Kiwanuka was already Prime Minister following his victory in the elections of 1961, Ugandans were still seeking for the Queen of England to remain Head of State for an Independent country.⁵¹²

While Obote and his party, the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC), promised that the Kabaka (king) of Buganda, as Head of State, would have supreme political powers, the Democratic Party under Benedicto Kiwanuka de-campaigned the UPC in other kingdom areas like Toro, Ankole and Bunyoro on the grounds that, if Buganda was given supreme power as suggested by UPC, Baganda would enslave people from other areas then resident in Buganda.⁵¹³ Kiwanuka's position did not make the Democratic Party popular among the supporters of the Kabaka, famously referred to as the 'Mengo' clique in Uganda's history. Buganda's parliament, the Lukiiko, accused the Democratic Party and Kiwanuka of betraying Buganda to the rest of the country.⁵¹⁴ In April 1962, the Baganda decided to form the Kabaka Yekka or 'King only' Party to protect the interests of the Buganda monarchy. In the elections of 1962, Obote manipulated the Baganda by entering an "unholy alliance" with the Kabaka Yekka (KY) party

⁵¹² G. Ibingira, *The Forging of an African Nation: The Political and Constitutional Evolution of Uganda from Colonial Rule to Independence, 1994-1962*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), 241.

⁵¹³ The politics of the day in Uganda on the eve of independence intensified ethnic and regional polarization. Obote later used this division to ally with the Kabaka Yekka (King only) party of Buganda to ride to power.

⁵¹⁴ Interview with Mathias Ngobi, 27 October, 2007- Jinja.

to defeat the Democratic Party under Kiwanuka. Subsequently, Obote became the Prime Minister of Uganda with executive powers, while the Kabaka (King) Mutesa II became the non-executive President as had been agreed in the Lancaster-London Conference of 1961.⁵¹⁵ In this way, Obote from the north had successfully manipulated the largest ethnic group (the Baganda) to come to power as Prime Minister of Uganda with executive powers. The second battle was how to keep this position and power. This then marked a new stage in Uganda's politics where ethnic consideration became significant.

Faced with intermittently intense ethnic political involvement, post-independence Uganda governments have adopted a variety of strategies. To some extent, these resulted from the political difficulties in which each leader found himself. In all the eight governments from 1961 to 2006, the leaders were willing to accept ethnicity as a legitimate basis for political participation; first for capturing power and also in keeping such power.

The Democratic Party under Benedicto Kiwanuka, which formed the first African government before independence in 1961 and ruled for a short time, had relied on the hatred that other ethnic groups had towards the Baganda in order to win the 1961 elections. Thereafter, he came under too much pressure to abandon reliance on bargains with ethnic middlemen and appeals to ethnic movements, especially the Bakonzo-Bamba and Sebei movements.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁵ D. H. Okalany, "Ethnicity and the Culture of Eating in Uganda", 190.

⁵¹⁶ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 195.

The Uganda Peoples Congress that came to office in 1962 and was assured of power only because of its parliamentary coalition with an avowed ethnic movement, the Kabaka Yekka (KY), largely exhibited politics of ethnic manipulation to stay in contention up to 1971.

After coming to power through the UPC-KY alliance, the UPC government first manipulated the political situation using ethnic issues. Obote did this especially after 1962 to gain political ground in Buganda and in other parts of Uganda; especially in the Kingdom areas of Southern Uganda.⁵¹⁷ In 1963, Obote began to argue that the diversity of ethnic identities was inherently negative and obstructive to successful nation building and development. This was a remarkable observation. While Obote's move towards a policy of minimizing the use of ethnicity in national affairs was good, the method he used of manipulating different ethnicities could only work in the short run. Because ethnicity is fluid and can be evoked in certain situations, it can also be dangerous in the longer run. This is how it turned out to be in the later years of Obote's rule. Public assertions of ethnicity in political life were eliminated but ethnic linkages remained strong in private.

Ethnic manipulation under Obote I government

To come to power, Obote had manipulated the Baganda through his 'unholy alliance' with the Kabaka Yekka (King alone) Party. However, for political survival, he had to introduce government measures to reduce the political use of ethnicity. Even then, however much effort was directed against Buganda, by

⁵¹⁷ Obwangor, 2007 interview Soroti

the time of his fall from power in 1971, he left Baganda with a heightened sense of their own ethnicity. It was this that later leaders like Idi Amin exploited to win over the Baganda as temporary friends after overthrowing Obote in 1971. After overthrowing Milton Obote in 1971, Amin had to explain his actions and employ different techniques in the first few months of his rule in order to gain legitimacy. One of the most productive techniques he employed was to offer ethnic concessions to those hurt by Obote's policies. The Baganda were the main recipients. The major tactic adopted by the government was first, to release forty-five of the ninety-two detainees, many of whom were publicly recognized as prominent Baganda.

Current Uganda President Yoweri Museveni also exploited ethnic hatred between the Baganda and northerners (Obote was a Langi from northern Uganda) to win support for his bush-war efforts in Luwero in Buganda. Museveni believed that "the problem in Uganda is that the leadership has mainly been from the north. The southerners, who are mainly Bantu, have played a peripheral role since independence in 1962. Therefore, Museveni also argues passionately how the Acholi as a whole and Obote's Langi tribesmen had participated in the looting of the south.

After the failure of the Nairobi Peace Talks held in Nairobi under the chairmanship of President Daniel Arap Moi in 1985, the NRA/NRM under Museveni intensified its efforts to over-run Kampala. While fighting in the southern part of Katonga in Buganda, the NRM/NRA under Museveni brought in Ronnie Mutebi, in order to reinforce Buganda's anti-northerner ethnic

politics⁵¹⁸. Museveni also made Professor Yusuf Lule (who had ruled Uganda for 68 days after the fall of Idi Amin) chairman of his National Resistance Movement as a way to attract support from Buganda.⁵¹⁹ In this way, Museveni used the Baganda as “pawns” in creating and perpetuating the stereotype of Obote, Acholi and Langi as the bane of Uganda politics

In 1960 when the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) was formed out of Obote’s wing of the Uganda National Congress (UNC) and the anti-Buganda Uganda People’s Union (UPU), Obote asserted that “African nationalism hates small states”.⁵²⁰ In March 1963, he again stated that;

the tribe has served our people as a basic political unit very well in the past. But now, the problem of putting the tribe above national consciousness is a problem we must face, and an issue we must destroy.⁵²¹

In spite of UPC’s coalition with the Kabaka Yekka (KY) Party between 1962 and 1964, the UPC government under Obote took a number of steps to counter ethnic politics. Unfortunately, different ethnic groups that had grievances or interests emanating from the colonial period like the Baganda, the Bakonzo-Bamba, the Sabiny of Sebei perceived Obote’s moves negatively. The Baganda, in particular, felt that after coming to power through alliance with the Kabaka Yekka (King Alone) Party, Obote was turning against them. From 1963, Buganda became the main problem that Obote had to deal with up to the 1971 coup by Idi Amin.

⁵¹⁸ Ronald Mutebi was an heir of Kabaka Mutesa II who had been deposed and exiled by Obote in 1965. By so doing, Museveni and his NRM/NRA assumed the Baganda that their Kabaka to be was part of the struggle.

⁵¹⁹ Prof. Lule was initially chairman of the Uganda Freedom Movement and as a staunch Muganda monarchist dedicated to restoring monarchism in Buganda (which Obote had abolished in 1966).

⁵²⁰ *Uganda Argus* 3 Feb. 1960,

⁵²¹ Quoted in D. Rothchild and M. Rogin, “Uganda”, 418.

The UPC government under Obote rejected demands by Buganda that *Ebyaffe* (our things) be returned to them. They, for instance, wanted to retain parts of Bunyoro's burial grounds that the colonial government had given to them as reward for collaborating with the British. They also wanted to dominate politics in Buganda unilaterally. The UPC and Obote refused to concede Buganda to Kabaka Yekka (KY) Party and, instead, began organizing party branches in Buganda in 1963.⁵²²

Before 1966, Obote was too weak politically to insist on changes in the political process that might have resulted in reducing the role of ethnicity in politics. First, he did not command total supremacy in the National Assembly then and, second, there were several disputes within his party (the UPC) in spite of the majority it held in parliament and in district councils by the end of 1964. In the UPC, there was a bitter fight for the position of Secretary-General between John Kakonge, the candidate of radicals calling for national mobilization, and Grace Ibingira, a representative of more conservative local notables with close links to the Kabaka (king) of Buganda's government.⁵²³ This internal fight was only solved through ethnic manipulation in the Gulu UPC conference of 1964.

According to Kirunda-Kivenjija, then in-charge of the UPC Research Bureau in 1963-1965, the conspiracy to remove Kakonge was finalized in 1964 in Kampala and involved allowing Busoga District to send more representatives to the Gulu

⁵²² C. Gertzel., *Party and Locality in Northern Uganda*, 12.

⁵²³ The climax of this conflict later involved Obote, his cabinet and party ranks. There were even rumours that Obote had been overthrown by Grace Ibingira and the Baganda at the height of this conflict. In this political circus, Obote could not deal with ethnic de-participation in Uganda's body-politic.

Conference than other districts. It also involved issuing new 'white' entrance cards to delegates loyal to Obote and against Kakonge as aspirant for Secretary-General. In the earlier preparation for this conference, all delegates were supposed to have and use 'Red cards' for one to be allowed entry. However, as a last minute ploy to deny Kakonge's supporters entry, Obote and his supporters decided to design new white cards as the official-entry cards for any delegate to attend without the knowledge of other delegates opposed to Obote. Most Kakonge's supporters and would-be voters were, thus, eliminated and Kakonge lost to Ibingira for the post of Secretary General.⁵²⁴ Having dealt with internal dissent, Obote then moved on to deal with the National Assembly.

The struggle for control of the ruling UPC Party intensified due to the influx into the UPC of unprincipled members of parliament who crossed the floor from Kabaka Yekka Party and the Democratic Party in the period 1963-1965. This move strengthened the UPC in the National Assembly into 1966. As Kasozi has noted, most of those who crossed the floor realized that it was 'violence not votes' that decided who controlled the distribution of resources in Uganda at that material time.⁵²⁵ It, therefore, followed that, since Obote had the means to satisfy their greed, it was ultimately Obote who benefited from their political shifts in the National Assembly. This unprincipled behaviour has remained a major characteristic of Ugandan politicians. By December 1964, the UPC had seventy-four seats, the DP had nine and the KY eight in the National Assembly.⁵²⁶ Although these members never represented the UPC's actual

⁵²⁴ Interview with Kirunda-Kivenjija -2007. See also N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 51, 148.

⁵²⁵ A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence*, 71.

⁵²⁶ A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence*, 71.

political strength and level of support among the Ugandan voters at the grassroots, Obote used their shifts to support UPC then to enjoy substantial political “legitimacy” that also gave him the legal justification and psychological ability to use violence against his competitors, both in the UPC party and the Uganda State.

Obote’s political machinations to weaken opponents fit well in S. P. Huntington’s model, which attributes political instability to absence of viable political institutions capable of domesticating power.⁵²⁷ It also reflects the dishonesty of the petty bureaucratic bourgeoisie members of parliament in changing party loyalties without consulting the voters. All these political activities laid the ground for conflict in Uganda in the not-too-distant future.

Uganda’s complex politics and political violence began effectively after 1964. The first explosive political problem that the UPC government under Obote handled constitutionally was the long standing political dispute between Buganda and Bunyoro kingdoms over the, so-called, ‘lost counties’. The counties in question were Buyaga and Bugangaizi. These counties belonged to Bunyoro before colonialism but were given to Buganda Kingdom as appreciation for its assistance in the conquest of Bunyoro kingdom by the British. Bunyoro had been the ancient enemy of Buganda and during the religious struggles in Buganda between the Protestants and Catholics, (1888), Bunyoro had given

⁵²⁷ S. P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 3.

shelter to many dissidents from Baganda preparing to attack the Buganda Kingdom.⁵²⁸

In 1893, when British forces overran Bunyoro and drove out Kabarega, they had done so with the assistance of the Baganda collaborators.⁵²⁹ The British had not found it expedient to resolve this dispute before independence and it was provided in the independence constitution that the Uganda government would carry out a referendum in those two counties in not less than two years after independence to ascertain the wishes of the inhabitants as to whether they wanted to remain in Buganda, return to Bunyoro, or be constituted into a separate district.⁵³⁰

The question of the return of this land had dominated politics for the Banyoro since. In 1901, the successor to Kabarega resigned as Omukama (King) over the “persecution” of Banyoro in the “lost counties”. In 1921, a political-ethnic committee, the Mubende-Bunyoro Committee was formed to agitate for the return of the land.⁵³¹

Ethnic-political participation came to a climax over this issue. In anticipation of this referendum, the Kabaka’s (King’s) government, led by the Kabaka himself, had tried to influence the outcome in advance by resettling a big number of

⁵²⁸ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 137.

⁵²⁹ J. Beattie, *The Nyoro State*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 74-94. See also F. Burke, *Local Government and Politics in Uganda*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1964), 77-85.

⁵³⁰ S.R. Karugire, *Roots of Instability in Uganda*, 51.

⁵³¹ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 137.

Buganda ex-service men in those counties.⁵³² In June 1964, Mutesa II (King of Buganda) burned down a Banyoro village in the “lost counties” because, as he explained, “a meeting to whip feelings against him was to be held there”.⁵³³ Mutesa had gone to the lost counties to try to prevent their transfer to Bunyoro. As independence approached, the Banyoro became fearful that an independent African government would be heavily dependent upon Buganda support and would refuse to entertain any notions of changing the boundaries. Two commissions set to resolve the impasse suggested different solutions. One resolved that the issue be solved through a referendum after independence and the other wanted the two counties to be transferred to Bunyoro before independence and that Mubende town, which contained certain shrines, be declared a municipality and thus be placed under the central government’, rather than Buganda’s jurisdiction.⁵³⁴

In 1964, Obote had gained an absolute majority in parliament and was no longer dependent on Buganda’s goodwill for political survival in parliament.⁵³⁵ In August 1964, a referendum bill was introduced in Parliament. The results showed that Buyaga and Bugangaizi overwhelmingly supported a merger with Bunyoro. In Buyaga, 8327 people voted for and only 1,287 voted against transfer. In Bugangaizi the figures were 3,275 for and 2,253 against joining Bunyoro.⁵³⁶

⁵³² N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 137.

⁵³³ The Kabaka of Buganda, (Edward Mutesa), *Desecration of My Kingdom*, (London: Constable, 1967), 170.

⁵³⁴ This position is in N. Kasfir’s *The shrinking political Arena; Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics* (1976)

⁵³⁵ G. Ibingira, *The Forging of an African Nation*, 69.

⁵³⁶ I. Hancock, “The Buganda Crisis of 1964”, *African Affairs*, 69, 275 (April 1970), 109-23.

The result of this referendum heightened ethnic tension and political differences between Mengo (the seat of the Kabaka) and the central government. It also led to civil commotion and bloodshed in Buganda and parts of Bunyoro and confirmed that Ugandans did not regard themselves as a people of one country but as essentially belonging to their parochial and sometimes hostile local government units. The UPC-KY alliance, having achieved its only purpose of ousting the DP from office, finally fell apart. Initially the UPC –KY alliance seemed to work well. Obote had, at around that time, even acquired a Muganda wife in what was always described in academic circles as “political sex” aimed at some superficial gesture of nationalism and unity of the people of Uganda. However, after the Bunyoro saga and at the height of hostility in Buganda, Obote even resorted to vulgar description of Baganda as “a good Muganda is a dead one”.⁵³⁷

Therefore, Obote’s insistence on following the constitutional requirement of holding a referendum marked an early stage in his willingness to introduce a policy of ethnic de-participation. However, while later events like the confrontation of 1966 (i.e. the Buganda crisis of 1966) crystallized this policy, it also made the Baganda more defiant of Obote, both after 1966 and 1971 when Amin overthrew Obote and in his second regime between 1980 and 1985, when the Baganda supported Museveni’s bush war in Luwero Obote.

In 1966, the Penal Code (Amendment Bill, 1966) was enacted. This bill made it an offence for any political organization to use names or symbols associated

⁵³⁷ T.V. Sathyamurthy, “The Social base of the Uganda Peoples Congress, 1958-70 in *African Affairs*, (1975), 416.

with the rulers of federal states or constitutional heads of districts. The bill targeted the Kabaka Yekka (KY) Party as it was the only political party using the name of the Kabaka. Even when Grace Ibingira, in a lengthy statement to parliament, tried to persuade the nation that the bill was to protect all political parties against the excesses of their opponents,⁵³⁸ the Baganda saw it as a ploy to destroy the KY party legally and subject the Kabaka (King) to some internal restrictions since he could not use the party to canvass for support or project his contrary views. The passing of this bill ended the legal existence of the Kabaka Yekka (KY) Party.

In December 1969, Obote banned all other political organizations after an attempt on his life at Lugogo stadium⁵³⁹. In this manner, the UPC legalized its monopoly of Uganda's political life at a time when it had become a conspicuous minority party in the country. The UPC then resorted to violence to control the wider opposition that developed against it over time.

The 1966 crisis was the last major political showdown between Obote and the Baganda Kingdom. On 24 May, 1966, Obote ordered the invasion of the Kabaka's palace at Lubiri on grounds that the Kabaka Mutesa II was planning a rebellion against the central government. The Kingdom of Buganda had passed a resolution on May 20 1966 asking the central government to move away from the "soil" of Buganda, which Obote described as "rebellion against the authority

⁵³⁸ For details on the debate, emotions and counter-accusation from the few Baganda members of Parliament of the KY Party. See Uganda Parliamentary *Hansard*, 53, 3450

⁵³⁹ S.R. Karugire, *Roots of Instability in Uganda*, 52.

and oneness of Uganda”.⁵⁴⁰ Obote then sent his army commander Major General Idi Amin to bombard the Kabaka’s palace at Lubiri in Mengo in the heartland of Buganda. The Ugandan army was, at that time, predominantly Nilotic in composition, with a few officers of Bantu origin.⁵⁴¹ After a day of fighting, the Kabaka was defeated and fled to Britain where he later died in exile. In his book entitled *Desecration of my Kingdom*, Mutesa said he had anticipated the attack on his palace. “We had been suspecting such a move for weeks,” he said, “and I myself had been surprised when nothing happened the previous evening”.⁵⁴²

After his victory, Obote then proceeded to introduce his own rules of the game, disguised as attempts to reduce the political use of ethnicity, and feudalism in Uganda. First, he abrogated the 1962 independence constitution and introduced the 1966 and 1967 constitutions in its place. The 1966 constitution kept many articles contained in its predecessor but removed several of the legal provisions that encouraged ethnic participation. Among the changes was the virtual elimination of autonomous powers of districts and federal kingdoms. It also targeted Buganda, where it declared that the Buganda government would not have the privilege of electing its members to the National Assembly or have the right to give official lands to chiefs. It reduced the Kabaka and other kingdom rulers to a ceremonial role on the same level as constitutional heads in the districts⁵⁴³. Henceforth Buganda was to be treated as a district no different

⁵⁴⁰ Obote’s speech in *Saturday Vision*, May 24, 2008:10-11

⁵⁴¹ G.F. Engholm and A. Mazrui, “Violent Constitutionalism in Uganda”, *Government and Opposition*, 2, 4 (July – October 1967), 585-599.

⁵⁴² G.F. Engholm and A. Mazrui, “Violent Constitutionalism in Uganda”, 585-599.

⁵⁴³ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 200.

from any other district in Uganda. All this was an attempt to weaken Buganda politically since it was the main threat to Obote's presidency. For instance, by reducing the Kabaka to a ceremonial position, on the same level as constitutional heads in the districts, Obote would remain the only dominant political figure in Uganda. Leaders after Obote like Idi Amin and Yoweri Museveni ably exploited Buganda's new level of ethnic nationalism against Obote to overthrow him in 1971 and rally support for the Luwero war of 1981-1985 against Obote by Yoweri Museveni.

Talking of the long term effects of the 1966 crisis on Uganda's politics, former Katikkiro (Prime Minister) of Buganda, Joshua Muayanja-Nkangi, says; "Obote ushered in militarism. From 1966 to almost 1985, the coming of Museveni, constitutionalism was almost out. I think there was only one year when there were no gun shots in this country. It was terrible".⁵⁴⁴ Some pundits like Jaberu Bidandi Ssali, leader of the People's Progressive Party, even think that since the 1966 incident, in order to rule the country, they had to conquer Buganda first. The 1967 constitution carried the changes of the previous year another step forward. First, and of great symbolic importance, the 1967 Republican Constitution abolished kingdoms and all kings, with the exception of the Kabaka of Buganda, were given pension. It also eliminated constitutional heads and divided Buganda into four (4) districts on the same basis as all other districts.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁴ Interview in the *New Vision*, 24, May 2007.

⁵⁴⁵ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 200.

Consequently, the new constitution increased the powers of Prime Minister Obote who then usurped even the powers of the president. Hence, by eliminating the independent powers of the districts and kingdoms, removal of Buganda's special privileges and the creation of a new and more powerful presidency, Obote thought he had dealt a death blow to ethnicity in politics and the role of Buganda in national politics. To the contrary, the Baganda were determined to assert themselves. The result was conflict.

The final humiliation of the Baganda came in 1968 when government took over the premises of the Buganda Parliament, the Lukiiko, in order to use the buildings as the Uganda Armed Forces Headquarters and converted the Kabaka's palace at Lubiri into a barracks. This act symbolizing the final desecration of the Kingdom was quite unnecessary, given that the effective powers of the Kabaka and the Lukiiko and already been destroyed.⁵⁴⁶ Under the Emergency Regulations that the security forces used, they were also allowed to arrest without warrant. While justifying the actions of the army in storming the Lubiri or palace of the Kabaka under these regulations, Obote stated: "It is within the context of the Emergency Regulations that security forces (yesterday) brought under this control all the palaces of the Kabaka".⁵⁴⁷ This act of taking control of Lukiiko was a gross affront to the Baganda, which further alienated them and reduced the chances of reconciliation between them and Obote's administration

⁵⁴⁶ A. Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890-1985*, 83.

⁵⁴⁷ See Obote's speech in *Saturday Vision*, May 24, 2008, 10.

According to Obote, it was the considered view of the government that everybody; inside and outside Uganda should know that “this country (Uganda) is one and shall remain one; under one administration, one Parliament of which honourable members now assembled are elected representatives of the people and Buganda remains an integral part of Uganda”.⁵⁴⁸ However, the long-term effect of Obote’s move was to exacerbate ethnic mobilization and destroy any chance of democratic solutions to ethnic cleavages. While it is true that Obote was trying to break up the heaviest concentration of power in the land (i.e. Buganda kingdom), safeguard his position and perhaps concentrate on the nation-building objectives of his UPC party, the method he used increased the state of ethnic nationalism among the Baganda and other kingdom areas of Uganda instead. Until 1971 when Idi Amin overthrew him, Obote regarded the Baganda as so hostile and unreliable that he kept Buganda under a state of emergency throughout this period (i.e. 1966-1971).⁵⁴⁹ Indeed, as Hon. Byanyima, MP Ankole North East then said, “the removal of the government and Parliament from Buganda could not mean the removal of opposition”.⁵⁵⁰

The southerners and westerners, who cherished kingdoms as part of their cultural heritage, felt aggrieved with their abolition, while the northerners, largely the Acholi and Langi, rejoiced. This became a watershed in post-independence politics in Uganda and a source of constant friction. The Baganda and people from the western part of the country also felt that the economy of Uganda, which they had dominated for many decades, was about to shift from

⁵⁴⁸ See Obote’s speech in *Saturday Vision*, May 24, 2008, 10.

⁵⁴⁹ H.B. Hansen, *Ethnicity and Military Rule in Uganda*, 66-71.

⁵⁵⁰ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 200.

their hands into those of the “uncivilized warriors” of the north and the east of Uganda.⁵⁵¹ It is evident, therefore, that Obote’s partisan authoritarianism played a key role in keeping ethnic consciousness alive in the country and waiting for an opportunity to re-assert itself. Obote himself was under no illusions that government measures promoting ethnic de-participation between 1962 and 1970 had eliminated ethnicity as a political force. As he later warned,

If the pull of the tribal force is allowed to develop, the unity of the country will be endangered. To reduce it to its crudest form is our duty because the pull of the tribal force does not accept Uganda as one country, does not accept the people of Uganda as belonging to one country, does not accept the National Assembly as a national institution but as an assembly of peace conference delegates and tribal diplomats, and legislative functionaries, and looks at the government of Uganda as a body of umpires or referees in some curious game of “Tribal Development monopoly.”⁵⁵²

Besides, Obote’s political manouvres of 1966-1971 also eroded the significance of parliament, the political parties and other civilian institutions as arenas for resolving political conflicts. The army, henceforth, was to become the arbiter in essentially civilian conflicts. For instance, after suspending the constitution and appointing himself executive president of Uganda, he quickly arrested five of his senior ministers; all southerners. These were Grace Ibingira, Kirya, Lumu, Magezi and Ngobi) whom he accused of insubordination.⁵⁵³ Obote achieved all this with what appeared to be relative ease by the blatant use of his northern dominated army. In 1971 when Amin stormed the political stage, civilian

⁵⁵¹ D. Okalany “Ethnicity and the Culture of Eating in Uganda” ,190. Okalany uses the derogatory word “uncivilized” to portray the way Buganda hold other tribes; especially Nilotic Acholi, Langi and their historical enemies- the Banyoro they have a tendency to refer to any tribe other than theirs as “Bacholi”, “Banyoro” to portray low level of education and social advancement.

⁵⁵² This position was expressed in the proposals for New Methods of Election of Representatives of the People to Parliament: Document No. 5 on the ‘Move To The Left’ (Kampala: Milton Obote Foundation, 1970), 6-7

⁵⁵³ S.R. Karugire, *Roots of Instability in Uganda*, 57.

political institutions were just too weak to contain the army. The ethnic divide that the country then suffered from partly explains the ease with which Idi Amin successfully executed the coup.

The other long-standing problem which Obote failed to resolve from the beginning was the Bakonzo-Bamba conflict with the Batoro. The Batoro, a break away Bunyoro ethnic unit, exercised control over the Rwenzori mountain areas where the Bakonzo/Bamba live; a part of Toro district, formerly Toro kingdom. Many Bakonzo living in the mountains had never experienced the sovereignty of any outsider; not even colonial authorities. Both Bamba and Bakonzo traditional political systems were decentralized in contrast with that of the Batoro.⁵⁵⁴

On the eve of Independence and in the first few years after independence (1961-1964), the Bakonzo/Bamba complained of discrimination in the provision of education, especially in the award of bursaries and scholarships.⁵⁵⁵ The reluctance by the central government to solve this problem led to violence by both the Bakonzo/Bamba against the Batoro. The delay in resolving this question was partly because Obote was sure of political support from Toro whose son of the soil later was Obote's Vice President (Babiiha) and Minister of Animals, Game and Fisheries. There was more to gain from Toro by way of political capital than the few and scattered Bamba.

⁵⁵⁴ N. Kasfir, *The Shrinking Political Arena*, 13.

⁵⁵⁵ *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Recent Disturbances amongst the Bamba and Bakonzo People of Toro*, (Kampala: Government Printer, 1962), 6-11.

In April 1964 thousands of Bakonzo and Bamba were massacred by the Batoro on the orders of Omukama George Rukidi. The Bakonzo/Bamba then decided to go to the bush and fight for their rights.⁵⁵⁶ Instead of resolving the problem through political means, the Obote government harassed and imprisoned the Bakonzo-Bamba. A statement by the Minister of Animals, Game and Fisheries, J.K. Babiha, a Mutoro, warning that the Bamba and Bakonzo faced extinction “within 10 years...and there will be nothing but to declare their areas a national park” greatly annoyed the Bamba-Bakonzo and led them to embark on a guerrilla war.⁵⁵⁷ This marked the beginning of the struggle of the people of Mt Rwenzori against the government of Uganda and for respect. This struggle continued until 15 August 1982 when Omusinga Charles Wesley Irema-Ngoma, the traditional head of Bakonzo/Bamba, decided to negotiate with the government for the recognition of the Bakonzo/Bamba.

In all these disputes, Ugandans mobilized for political action as Baganda, Bamba, Bakonzo, and Banyoro and not as Ugandans. In all the ensuing struggles, ethnic groups emerged and played prominent political roles. Fred Burke rightly described Ugandan politics immediately after independence that tended toward continued political and administrative fragmentation as “the legacy of tribalism and separatism”.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁶ S.R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 176. See also Syahuka- Muhindo, “The Rwenzururu Movement and Democratic Struggle”, in M. Mamdani & Oloka-Onyango (Eds.), *Uganda: Studies in Living Conditions, Popular Movements and Constitutionalism*, (Kampala: JEP and CBR, 1994), 299.

⁵⁵⁷ *Uganda Argus*, March 11, 1964.

⁵⁵⁸ F. Burke, *Local Government and Politics in Uganda*, 231.

The major problem that Uganda suffered from in the immediate post-colonial period is that the political class that inherited the nation-state reproduced rather than deconstructed ethnicity in Uganda's body politic. The main objective of any serious nation-state project should have been to dismantle and concurrently rebuild institutions that would destroy ethnicity and regionalism in national politics. As Mamdani notes, the reforms in Uganda were limited, as they did not deconstruct political bases of ethnic consciousness and restructure the economy to diffuse ethnic and regional material expression".⁵⁵⁹

Where Obote attempted to deconstruct the body politic, the methods used were questionable. For instance, in 1969 when he declared the UPC as the only political party in Uganda on grounds that he aimed at political unity through one-party politics, the result was just the opposite. As Burke put it, "majority power was employed primarily to harass and destroy the opposition rather than to pursue policies to which the minority might be opposed".⁵⁶⁰ Even though the colonial state had not been intended to be a school of democracy, as Berman⁵⁶¹ reminds us, the political elite who took over should have done their best to adopt acceptable democratic reforms.

Instead, independence was followed by militarism and military regimes, the stifling of civil society as parties were banned and by ethnically-based state systems. These characteristics run through all the post-colonial regimes in Uganda. These were or have been employed by the Amin regime (1971-1979),

⁵⁵⁹ M. Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda*, 288-291.

⁵⁶⁰ F. Burke, *Local Government & Politics in Uganda*, 231.

⁵⁶¹ B. Berman, "Ethnic Pluralism and Political Centralization", 329.

Obote II (1980-1985), and the current ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) government (1986-to-date).

The Idi Amin regime 1971-1979

While Obote attempted a strategy of ethnic de-participation between 1962 and 1971, Idi Amin's policy remained more ambiguous and hence, to a great extent, aroused the very ethnic fears that Obote tried to dampen.

Amin's seizure of power was welcomed with enthusiasm and excitement especially in Buganda. For many Ugandans, Amin was the 'saviour of Uganda' from the Obote dictatorship. Most people expected the Amin regime to usher in an era of peace, reconciliation, national unity and economic prosperity. To their utter surprise, the opposite was true. The conflicts that characterized his regime can be explained largely by his attempt to use ethnicity to settle old political scores.

The British press heralded Amin's military takeover. Now that Obote was out of the way, Britain could "pursue the course of her own strategic interests lightened of one mill-stone".⁵⁶² Their support and praise for Idi Amin was, however, short lived and it was not long before Amin declared himself conqueror of the British Empire (CBE), to Britain's dismay.

Nelson Kasfir suggests that explanations of the actions of Amin and his government must be considered with much caution because his policies seemed

⁵⁶² *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 January 1971.

to change from day to day. His approach to ethnicity in politics followed suit. A month after taking power, Amin said “we want to build our country as a single, united and strong nation; and not as a federation of petty and powerless tribes that are jealous of one another”.⁵⁶³

This was a back up of the 18 points Amin gave to justify the 1971 coup against Obote. In the eight years of his rule, ethnicity and victimisation along ethnic lines became the order of the day.

Amin’s difficulty in justifying the coup was a consequence of the awkward fact that he took power without the support of a large segment of the army. The split in the army between those who remained loyal to Obote and those who supported his coup accounts for Amin’s constant reference throughout much of 1971 to “guerillas” attacking Uganda and for the subsequent massacre of soldiers and officers which came to public attention in June and July 1971.⁵⁶⁴

The sixteenth of the 18 points Amin gave to justify the coup singled out Obote’s nepotism in the army as a major cause for the coup. He contended that he was forced to act because “Acholi and Langi” soldiers attempted to disarm soldiers of other “tribes” on Obote’s orders. He then stepped in to prevent a “mutiny”.⁵⁶⁵ As he argued,

Obote, on the advice of Akena-Adoko (then chief of Intelligence), has sought to divide Uganda Armed Forces and the rest of Uganda by picking out his tribesmen and putting

⁵⁶³ This was in “Speech to the Nation by His Excellency Major-General Idi Amin Dada”. For details, see the *Uganda Gazette*, 64, 8 (26 February 1979), 79.

⁵⁶⁴ Collin Legum’s report in *The Observer*, London, 25, July 1971:5.

⁵⁶⁵ *The People*, 27 Jan. 1971, 1.

them in key positions in the Army and key parastatals. Examples are the Chief General Service Officer, the Export and Import Corporation, Uganda Meat Packers, the Public Service Commission, Nyanza Textile and a Russian Textile Factory to be established in Lango.⁵⁶⁶

By casting political action in ethnic terms, however, Idi Amin immediately created a threatening situation for people both inside and outside the army who were easily identified as Acholi and Langi. From the start, therefore, he reversed Obote's policy of avoiding all public reference to ethnic units as political actors.

As Hansen writes of Amin's position then:

Obote the individual became identified with the whole Lango group and his regime with the Acholi as well. This reflects the kind of ethnic stereotyping that came to characterize Ugandan politics during the Amin era. In the 1980s, Museveni's guerillas in Luwero Triangle were often referred to as 'Banyarwanda' and non-Baganda of Nilotic stock became the "Bacholi."⁵⁶⁷

During the early years of his violent rule, Idi Amin extended conflict into Acholiland by ordering mass killings of Acholi army personnel as well as executions of prominent Acholi intellectuals, politicians, religious leaders, including Jonan Luwum, then Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, and Acholi civilians. It is widely acknowledged that thousands of Acholi civilians died and that many more fled the country.⁵⁶⁸ Innocent Acholi civilians and intellectuals were then stereotyped on account of their kinsmen in the Obote army.

⁵⁶⁶ Appendix 4, S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 238.

⁵⁶⁷ Appendix 4, S. R. Karugire, *A Political History of Uganda*, 238.

⁵⁶⁸ A. G. G. Ginyera-Pinywa, *Northern Uganda, in National Politics*, 4. See also H. Holger Bernt, *Ethnicity as a Political Feature in Uganda*, 110, or H. Kyemba, *A State of Blood*, 44, or P. Mutibwa, *Uganda Since Independence*, 87.

By the beginning of 1973, 20 out of the 23 Acholi and Langi army officers of the rank of Lt. Colonel and above at the time of the coup had been killed.⁵⁶⁹ The selective liquidation of opponents, real or imaginary by Idi Amin did not appear to be alarming because of the ethnic division in the country then. An insider in Amin's regime from 1971 to 1977 wrote of the pattern of atrocities in the early period of Amin's rule as follows:

His (Amin's) 'enemies' at this stage were principally the Acholi and Langi. Obote was a Langi (sic)- sufficient reason for Amin to suspect the entire tribe – and the Acholis also formed a large proportion of the armed forces, so Amin lumped them together. He used to tell his cabinet that there were 'mopping-up' operations going on, but we (the cabinet) had no idea what this meant until later.⁵⁷⁰

The killing of people mostly from these two ethnic groups (Acholi and Langi) had the effect of dividing the country. These two groups were widely perceived as having been the main beneficiaries of the Obote administration and the majority of people from other ethnic groups tended to be indifferent to the massacres that were taking place. In an attempt to co-opt the support of Acholi and Langi, Major Oboma, a senior Acholi officer, made an appeal on Uganda Radio for the Acholi and Langi to accept the change of government, so as to save the lives of innocent people in their region.⁵⁷¹ It is clear that both the regime and the population then perceived and evaluated security and allegiance in linguistic and ethnic terms.

The seeds of ethnicity that Idi Amin sowed were to affect Uganda more adversely after his fall. In his speeches, Amin tended to stereotype people as if their

⁵⁶⁹ J. Mugaju, *Uganda's Age of Reform*, 28.

⁵⁷⁰ H. Kyemba, *A State of Blood*, 44-45.

⁵⁷¹ Uganda Government *Annual Report*, (Kampala: Government Printer, 1972), 32-33.

ethnic identity were the most salient features of their personality. For instance, he referred to the Obote partisans undergoing military training in Tanzania as mainly “Alur, Acholis (sic), Langi and Bagisu...”. “According to the latest information”, he once stated, “Lango (sic) are no longer in the majority... Alurs and Jonam are being smuggled out in larger numbers to Tanzania”.⁵⁷²

In discussing rumours of another coup, Amin said, “Last year there was confusion among the Alur people, then among the Jonam, and now it is the Lugbara”.⁵⁷³ The crux of the matter then was that being born from any of such ethnic (tribal) groups was a crime no matter whether one was in the army or was a peasant farmer tilling the infertile soils in such regions. Ethnic manipulation and stereotyping that became a salient feature of Amin’s eight years rule led to uncontrollable killings and conflict in much of the country.

In later years, he could not even trust his Kakwa brothers or Lugbara cousins to execute his policies. He then resorted to Nubians (brought to Uganda from Sudan by the British during the colonial conquest phase) and Banyarwanda (from Rwanda) as the most reliable ethnic groups to man his internal security system. Nubians became an important political factor after 1971 and they held many important positions in the government and the army during Idi Amin’s rule. When Idi Amin launched the “economic war” in 1972 and expelled all Asians, including citizens, from Uganda within three months, most of the property confiscated from Asians was either taken over by Government officials

⁵⁷² *Uganda Argus*, 14 October, 1971, 1.

⁵⁷³ *Uganda Argus*, 8 October, 1972, 1.

or was handed over to Nubians and the few trusted army officers like Malyamungu, Faroak and Minawa.⁵⁷⁴ According to Major Zed Maruru, a retired air force senior pilot who worked with Idi Amin, the State Research Bureau was staffed by trusted Nubians and Banyarwanda mercenaries.⁵⁷⁵

Major Maruru also states that he would not blame Amin for all the deaths that occurred because Amin's henchmen would take it upon themselves to kill, well knowing that nobody would care to cross check if Amin had given the order. Secondly, the henchmen were so close to Amin that even if the facts came up, it was believed that getting them prosecuted was not possible.⁵⁷⁶

Later on, especially after the fall of Amin in 1979, West Nilers were to be stereotyped on the basis of Amin, who was himself a Kakwa of that region. West Nilers who lived in Gulu town fled for fear of indiscriminate persecution⁵⁷⁷. During Obote's second term in power (1980-1985), soldiers in the new army, the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA), took revenge on people living in the West Nile region.⁵⁷⁸ This led to conflict in the West Nile region against Obote II government as pro-Amin insurgent groups such as Uganda Rescue Front (URF), Former Uganda National Army (FUNA) launched attacks from Congo (then Zaire)

⁵⁷⁴ Nubians are a complicated lot of people. Members of this ethnic unit have lived in what is now Uganda for over a hundred and fifty years they even include people who can trace their ancestors back to Northern Nigeria, who settled in Sudan on their way back from Mecca. They were among the "Sudanese soldiers recruited by the British for the conquest of Bunyoro in the 1890s and later taken into the King's African Rifles. They illustrate how ethnicity can be fluid. They have since remained in Uganda (as a recognized) ethnic group and occupy large tracts of land in Bombo (Some 30 kms from Kampala) where Idi Amin gave them surveyed land.

⁵⁷⁵ Interview with Major Zed Maruru, *Daily Monitor*, July 22, 2007, 12.

⁵⁷⁶ Interview with Major Zed Maruru, *Daily Monitor*, July 22, 2007, 12.

⁵⁷⁷ F Sverker, *Living with Bad Surroundings*, 97.

⁵⁷⁸ J. Crisp, "Nationalism, Human Rights and Population Displacement: Luwero District", in *Reviews of African Political Economy*, 27/28 (1984). See also A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 17, P.G. Okoth & B. Ogot, *Conflict in Contemporary Africa*, 106.

and the Sudan into the West Nile region of Uganda, adding to the violence in that region. Within a few years, some 300,000 people had fled to neighbouring Sudan.⁵⁷⁹ This shows how far Amin and later Obote's actions increased the significant importance of ethnicity in Uganda that fuelled conflict.

During the Amin regime, a Moslem-Christian division also became manifest. Idi Amin was not only a West Niler but a Nubi-Muslim as well. In the eyes of many Ugandans, political and military powers were ultimately connected with the social order of regional division. Amin and his contemporaries were simply continuing what had been initiated during the colonial years. In his years, ethnic and religious polarization intensified.

By 1975, Amin had created several new ethnically and religiously based security organizations, which reported directly to him and which ruthlessly killed thousands of Ugandans. According to a report by the New York City Bar Association's Committee on International Human Rights, the estimated number of victims of Amin's reign of terror was between 100,000 and 500,000. According to the report,

Within three months after he took power, Amin suspended all democratic rights, gave the army dictatorial powers of arrest and punishment and set up a military tribunal to try political offenders. A period of terror administered by the army (dominated by Sudanese mercenaries, the Anyanya, Kakwa and Nubian ethnic groups from Amin's West Nile region) and security forces followed.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁹ H. Bond & E. Barbara, *Imposing Aid*, 32-42.

⁵⁸⁰ Quoted in *Human Rights Watch*, (1997), 32.

In his period, ethnicity and religion were, once again, used to reconfigure the state structures as a basis of power. His promise of democratic rule at the time of the coup was quickly forgotten as he became a principle agent of tribalism, religious sectarianism and dictatorship. In the 1970s, at the height of Amin's dictatorship, Ugandans at home and abroad failed to form an effective liberation movement to rescue their country from the reign of terror. The politicians could not transcend the politics of ethnicity and regionalism. As Mugaju summarises the situation then, "Within the country, Ugandans were too terrified and traumatized to resist Amin while Ugandan refugees were too scattered to organize an effective opposition-group".⁵⁸¹

When Idi Amin was overthrown in 1979 by a combined force of the Tanzanian Army, the Tanzanian Peoples Defence Forces, and Ugandan guerilla armies under the Uganda National Liberation Front/Army, there were celebrations in much of the country. There was also a ray of hope that the country would settle and enjoy peace. Unfortunately, this hope was shattered sooner than later, as the Ugandan political elite fought each other for supreme power. Between 1980 and 1986, Ugandans experienced major political disagreements, rigged elections, suppression of democratic principles and rights, ethnic divisions and conflicts.

1979-1986, the Years of Political Experiment and Social Chaos

After the fall of Idi Amin in 1979, it was hoped that Ugandans and especially the political and military elite, would realize that the country's problems were

⁵⁸¹ J. Mugaju, *Uganda's Age of Reform*, 31.

mainly due to political disorganization and division. This did not come to be and instead, between April 1979 and January 1986, Ugandans were subjected to the inept rule of five separate governments and a major internal civil conflict in Luwero in Buganda. As Kasozi notes of the five governments,

None had a firm hold on the police, the secret services or the prisons. As a result, lines of authority and power in both government and paramilitary agencies were chaotic, with the result that soldiers in the Binaisa, Obote II and Okello governments often defied orders and could indulge in unprofessional behaviour throughout most of this period.⁵⁸²

The short-term umbrella government, The Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) government, under Yusufu Lule (who ruled for 68 days) and Godfrey Binaisa, who came after Lule, did not support immediate restoration of multiparty politics and were removed from power through violent and undemocratic means. In May 1980, Obote loyalists in the Military Commission led by Paulo Muwanga carried out a coup and, once again, the question of the military became central in the politics of Uganda.

The fall of Idi Amin exposed the fragmented nature of Uganda's political elite. In the brief Lule period, politics in Uganda was largely determined by nine contending forces. First and most important was Tanzania, whose military forces had conquered Idi Amin. Second was the thirty-member National Consultative Council (NCC) elected at the Moshi Conference in Tanzania. This organ was largely used by Tanzania to mislead the International community that all political decisions then were taken by Ugandans, even when the Tanzanians pulled the strings behind the scenes. Third, and a potential danger,

⁵⁸² A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence*, 128.

were the pro-Obote elements in the army and civilian administration, including General Tito Okello and Chief of Staff of UNLA, David Oyite Ojok.

As Lule later complained, there were many pro-Obote individuals in the government that had been forced on him by Tanzania and who occupied key positions in administration and sought Obote's return to power⁵⁸³. Moreover, there was the Kikosi Maalum, a para-military group known for its high military preparedness and brutality, under David Oyite-Ojok.

In addition were fighting groups like FRONASA led by Yoweri Museveni and other minor groups that claimed to have contributed to the fall of Idi Amin like members of the Democratic Party (DP), and Uganda Freedom Movement,⁵⁸⁴ the Gang of four (Edward Rugumayo, Dani Wadada Nabudere, Omwony Ojok and Yash Tandon), and the Nairobi Group which included Tarsis Kabwegyere.

These different political-military groups were largely ethnic organizations and always interpreted political issues along ethnic lines. For instance, when President Lule reshuffled his cabinet on 7 June 1979 without consulting Tanzania and the National Consultative Council (NCC), he was accused by other Ugandan politicians of favouring Buganda. He was also accused of making a grave political mistake when he made his first address to the nation in his local language (Luganda). Although the number of Baganda he appointed to key ministries was proportionate to their overall share of the population, this was

⁵⁸³ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence*, 129-131.

⁵⁸⁴ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence*, 129-131.

enough to frighten non-Baganda.⁵⁸⁵ This exposes the importance of the 'Buganda factor' in the country's politics since the colonial times. As Mazrui (1974) has written, "Uganda is an impossible county to govern effectively with the support of Buganda, but is also impossible to govern effectively without the support of the Buganda".⁵⁸⁶ The Buganda problem recurred and seemed to override other issues in the later conflicts.

For instance, when Lule suggested recruiting proportionately for the army from each of Uganda's regions, he was opposed because that move would give undue advantage to the Baganda who formed the majority population in Uganda. His administrative innovation of creating four regions and appointing four regional commissioners, two of whom were Shaban Opolot and Balaki Kirya (both men were anti Obote), also brought him problems with the pro-Obote elements in his government. This led to politics of alliance and counter alliance against and for President Lule. Lule's failure to fully comprehend the dynamics of the prevailing political forces and the ethnic factor in Uganda's politics brought him down.

The transition from President Yusufu Lule to Godfrey Binaisa was followed by bloodshed. When the population took to street demonstrations in Lule's support, troops were deployed and dead bodies were later discovered in the Kololo Golf Course in Kampala and elsewhere. Godfrey Binaisa's reign ended in May 1980 when Paulo Muwanga leader of the Military Commission carried out a coup against the Binaisa Government. This Commission was chaired by Paulo

⁵⁸⁵ Translated in political terms, the number of Baganda mattered because there was fear of Baganda domination since the colonial times. Such politics of divide and rule employed by the British was carried on with in the post-colonial period by the different leaders as a way to consolidate their power.

⁵⁸⁶ A. Mazrui, *The Social Origins of Uganda's Presidents*, 3-25.

Muwanga with Yoweri Museveni as its deputy. Other members were Oyite-Ojok, Tito-Okello, Zed Maruru and Captain Omaria. This was an arm of the Uganda army (UNLF) which had usurped powers of the main body (UNLF). Once again, the question of the military and retention of power were central in Uganda's post-independence politics.

Second Obote government (The Luwero civil war of 1981-1986) and the manipulation of Ethnicity

The period 1980-1986 was another traumatic moment in Uganda's politics and history. On 10 December 1980, the partisan Military Commission organized a multi-party election in which four (4) main parties (UPC, D.P, UPM and CP) participated. The outcome of this election, allegedly won by UPC and Obote, was disputed by all other political parties. This became a recipe for conflict between 1981 and 1986.

Even before the controversial elections of 1980, as Mugaju notes, plans were already underway to resist what was regarded as the Tanzania-sponsored restoration of Obote to power. Different fighting groups emerged on the eve of the elections. For instance, Moses Ali formed his Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF), the Former Uganda National Army (FUNA) regrouped in Sudan with the aim of fighting Obote in case he was forcefully imposed on Ugandans and later, in 1981, Yoweri Museveni launched his famous armed struggle in the Luwero Triangle in Buganda.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁷ J. Mugaju, *Uganda's Age of Reform*, 36.

Other fighting groups opposed to the Obote II government included the Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM), the Uganda National Liberation Front-Anti-dictatorship (UNLF-A) and the Federal Movement of Uganda (FEDEMU).⁵⁸⁸ Once again, the political elite in Uganda had failed to work out a formula for balancing internal political differences, and conflict resulted. The competing factions for political power then opted to operate outside the political formulae established by the constitution.

Once in power after the 1980 elections, Obote made no effort to respect the opposition. The spirit of tolerance and reconciliation, which is essential for the functioning of multi-party politics and democracy, did not exist in Uganda under the Obote II regime. The 1980s elections, as Mugaju rightly noted,

broke all the principles and practices of multi-partism. The nomination of party candidates was a farce. During the campaigns, there was more talk about which party had more military commanders and was capable of 'meeting violence with violence, intimidation with intimidation' than which party programmes were likely to pull Uganda out of the post-Amin quagmire.⁵⁸⁹

The result was a declaration of war in February 1981 against the government by Yoweri Museveni, the leader of the Uganda Patriotic Movement who had himself lost a constituency election to Sam Kutesa of the Democratic Party. Ethnicity then became a major factor in the subsequent war and mobilization of different guerilla movements.

⁵⁸⁸ J. Mugaju, *Uganda's Age of Reform*, 36.

⁵⁸⁹ J. Mugaju, and Oloka-Onyango (Eds.), *No-Party Democracy in Uganda: Myths and Realities*, 22.

The hopes that had been raised by the return of an elected civilian government after the 1980 'victory' of Obote and the UPC, according to Omara-Otunnu , were endangered from the start by rival claimants to political power who had been disappointed by the election results. Within days of the election results, President Obote declared his view on the role of the Army in internal security in an interview with the BBC:

I don't think Uganda is threatened by her neighbours: I can't see any neighbour wanting to invade Uganda. So the issue is not the external problem; it is internal security. And that is not a police job; it is an army job.⁵⁹⁰

A number of groups were involved in the struggle to oust Obote after the rigged 1980 elections. First was the National Resistance Movement (NRM) led by Yoweri Museveni and his NRA; largely people from Ankole and Kigezi in Western Uganda, then Former Uganda Army (FUNA), the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNFR) from West Nile, Uganda Freedom Movement, (UFM) and the Federal Democratic Movement (FEDEMU), exclusively from Buganda.

Obote faced intense and sustained military opposition throughout his second tenure. Although Obote victimized ethnic groups like the Baganda and the Banyarwanda in Luwero who would not willingly support his administration,⁵⁹¹ he failed to cow them into submission. Instead, such groups fought back using the same tool, ethnicity, in politics and the army which Obote himself had used to rule since 1966.

⁵⁹⁰ *BBC World Service*, 13 December 1980, quoted by Omara Otunnu in *Politics and the Military in Uganda*.

⁵⁹¹ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 145.

The Luwero civil war of 1981-1985 exposed the extent to which political manipulation based on ethnic and religious differences became the main means used by political elite in Uganda to mobilize and rally the masses for their cause. First, Museveni, as leader of the National Resistance Army/Movement, took advantage of the intense dislike of Obote in Buganda and launched his guerilla war in the region. As Lwanga-Lunyiigo observed,

The National Resistance Movement leadership fell prey to the myths of Acholi as a martial tribe in whipping up the threat of the “Anyanya” and “northerners” in order to get support for the war in Buganda where Obote had deposed the Kabaka in 1965.⁵⁹²

Yet, in reality, as Lamwaka has noted,

The Acholi never started the war in Luwero, neither did the Acholi civilians and elders organize themselves and bless the atrocities. Although a good number of top commanders in the UNLA (the Uganda army) were Acholi, there were also many from other ethnic groups, the real blame should have gone to the government of the day; that is Obote II and partially shared by Museveni himself who started the Luwero war, individual commanders, including the Acholi soldiers, could then be blamed individually.⁵⁹³

Gersony, an external observer, supports the above argument; “the Acholi,” he states,

were only one of the several ethnic groups prominently represented in the Uganda army, Acholi forces in the army appears to have been generally subordinated to senior officers of president Obote’s Langi tribe.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹² S. Lwanga-Lunyiigo, “The Colonial Roots of Internal Conflict”, 45.

⁵⁹³ C. Lamwaka, quoted by F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surroundings: War and Existential Uncertainty in Acholiland Northern Uganda*, 118.

⁵⁹⁴ R. Gersony, *The Anguish of Northern Uganda: Results of a Field-based Assessment of the Civil Conflict in Northern Uganda*, (London: International Alert, 1997), 10.

In an interview with *DRUM Magazine* in Nairobi in 1985, Museveni categorically stated that “the problem in Uganda is that the leadership has mainly been from the north. The Acholi are everywhere: in the army, big offices, etc. The southerners, who are mainly Bantu, have played a peripheral role all these years since Independence in 1962.”⁵⁹⁵

Such collective blame (a kind of stereotype) was extended to the “northerners” in general and to the Acholi in particular because of their presence in Luwero. Besides, Yusuflu Lule who had been deposed by the pro-Obote forces backed by the Tanzanians was made leader of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) for the purpose of whipping up support in Buganda.

The NRM and other guerilla movements that sprung up against the Obote II government also had largely ethnic support. For instance, the Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM) led by Andrew Kayira was also launched in Buganda. This was a Ganda chauvinist organization which did not have much appeal beyond Buganda. Then there was the Federal Movement of Uganda (FEDEMU) that aimed at the restoration of kingship in Buganda.⁵⁹⁶ Such movements, including the NRM of Yoweri Museveni increasingly entrenched regionalism and ethnicity in military politics in Uganda.

The manipulation and stereotyping of the Acholi was not restricted to the National Resistance Movement of Yoweri Museveni. As the Luwero War

⁵⁹⁵ *Drum Magazine*, October 9th 1985.

⁵⁹⁶ J. Okuku, “Ethnicity, State Power and the Democratic Process in Uganda”, 19.

intensified, sectarian cleavages began to emerge within the UNLA. Some of the people interviewed in Acholi⁵⁹⁷ were of the opinion that Obote had manipulated the Acholi in the Luwero Triangle war for his own political ends. Indeed as Pain Dennis points out, “for his political survival, Obote had begun to look at the Acholi officers in the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) as being rather independent of his political motivations and therefore a danger to his rule”.⁵⁹⁸

The Acholi, on their part, complained that the deaths in Luwero were disproportionately high and that only Obote’s tribesmen, the Langi, were being promoted⁵⁹⁹. Between 1983 and 1985, Obote increasingly relied on a small core of officers from his own sub-ethnic group to take command of the army. For instance, Captain Ageta, who was a relatively junior officer, was put in-charge of a newly created “Reconnaissance Unit” that was equipped with mounted guns and operated within the Central Brigade where Luwero was located. The Acholi commander-Bazilio Okello-Olara was in charge of this brigade but could not direct Captain Ageta’s activities. When Bazilio Okello later discovered that Captain Ageta was engaged in unlawful activities and wanted to punish him, Brig. Smith Opon-Acak, a relative of Obote and Army-Chief of Staff after the death of Oyite-Ojok, told Okello that Ageta was directly answerable to the chief of staff.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁸ P. Dennis, “Bending the Spears; Producing Consensus for Peace and Development in Northern Uganda” (London: International Alert, 1997), 50.

⁵⁹⁹ Human Rights and Peace Center Doc, 2003, 30.

⁶⁰⁰ A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 172.

The point here is that the rift between Obote and the Acholi officers and men in the army was based on ethnic considerations rather than disagreements on military priorities. Obote intensified this rift when he promoted many Langi officers so that, by the end of 1985, the Acholi had lined up behind Vice President Paulo Muwanga (A Muganda) in opposition to Obote (a fellow northerner)⁶⁰¹.

At the height of the Luwero war, Obote's cabinet was also divided between two principal factions. The first was led by Obote as president and consisted of young men in their early forties or late thirties, including Chris Rwakasisi, Peter Otai, Dr. Luwuliza Kirunda and others. This group controlled the National Security Agency (NASA); a spy network that had information on many people and organizations. The other faction led by Paulo Muwanga, possibly with the co-operation of Prime Minister (then) Otema Alimadi, was backed by Acholi army Commander-Tito Okello and other Acholi Officers. Obote's politics of divide and rule had greatly weakened his government by 1985. The Muwanga faction and Acholi soldiers even felt that the Luwero war was wasteful and wanted direct negotiations with Yoweri Museveni.⁶⁰² Paulo Muwanga used this period to establish links with the NRM and Museveni who was then in exile in Sweden.

⁶⁰¹ Human Rights & Peace Centre document, 2003,30.
⁶⁰² A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 172-173.

The Overthrow of Obote

On 27 July 1985, Obote was overthrown by his one-time loyal Acholi commander Tito Okello, backed by Bazilio Okello-Olara. The two Okellos then formed a Military Council to administer the country. By the time of the 1985 coup, Milton Obote was gradually setting a stage for the elimination of Acholi officers from the Uganda Army. The National Security Agency (NASA) was then essentially an anti-Acholi intelligence organ whose reports had indicated secret contact between the Acholi, the Democratic Party, the National Resistance Movement/Army and the late Catholic Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga (RIP).⁶⁰³ As early as 1984, Obote had virtually handed over the responsibility for the Luwero Triangle war to NASA. It was at that time that the Acholi officers began to retreat to the north from where they organized the final assault on Kampala and overthrew Obote.

The 1985 coup epitomized the politics of ethnic manipulation that characterized the second Obote regime. It was an internal coup by the Acholi officers as a pre-emptive self-defence move by the Acholi military elite against their Langi brother. It worked well for the National Resistance Movement of Yoweri Museveni who easily exploited the situation to defeat the Okellos in 1986 and come to power. Once again, the bullet, rather than the ballot had determined Uganda's course of politics.

The rise of the National Resistance Movement and Conflict in Acholiland, 1986-2006

⁶⁰³ P. Dennis, "Bending the Spears", 30.

After Obote's overthrow in 1985, Tito Okello and his cousin Bazilio Okello set up a military commission to administer the country. Its leader Tito Okello became government leader and president of Uganda, with Bazilio Okello as chief of Staff. The period that followed was that of violence, leading to another violent change of government when Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Army (NRA) fought his way into power on 26 January, 1986.

The Okello government, commonly referred to as the Military Junta, rushed to incorporate all the fighting forces and to reconcile with remnants of the Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM) and the Former Uganda Army (FUNA). They also tried to persuade the NRM of Yoweri Museveni to join them in a coalition government. The NRA/M rejected this call on grounds that "there had been no fundamental political change in Kampala".⁶⁰⁴

From August to December 1985, peace talks were held in Nairobi under the chairmanship of Kenya's president Arap Moi. These Nairobi Peace Talks, which later became dubbed 'peace jokes', were never a serious proposition to stop the National Resistance Movement/Army under Yoweri Museveni from completing its mission of ethnic cleansing of the Acholi from the political scene. Bethuel Kipligat, then permanent secretary in the Kenya Ministry of Foreign Affairs and who played a key role in facilitating the negotiations, described the four months of negotiations as a process of "haggling and cajoling" by the two parties. He said:

⁶⁰⁴ A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*, 174.

They began the talks by hurling insults at each other and continued to do so throughout the proceedings. Museveni denounced the previous regimes in Uganda as ‘primitive and backward’. He initially refused to negotiate with the military council delegation, dismissing them as ‘criminals.’ He in turn was accused by the military council of delaying the negotiation process unnecessarily . . . Once an agreement was reached on an agenda item, Museveni would change his position the following day; or put forward new demands on the same matter.⁶⁰⁵

It is clear that with this kind of manoeuvres, no serious agreement could be reached. Participation in these ‘peace jokes’ was part of the NRM/A’s military strategy because they used the four months to arm themselves for the final assault on Kampala. The NRM/A succeeded in hoodwinking the Okellos but set a precedent of mistrust that has dogged later peace talks between the government of Yoweri Museveni and the different rebel groups in northern Uganda.⁶⁰⁶

On their way to Kampala, the NRM/A brought in Ronnie Mutebi, Buganda’s Kabaka king-to-be, in order to reinforce Buganda’s anti-Northerner ethnic politics by playing up the issue of restoration of the Buganda monarchy to win support for the final push against ‘the Okellos’ in Kampala. Supported by the Uganda army dominated by the Acholi, Obote had been responsible for the dismemberment of the kingdom in 1966.

⁶⁰⁵ B. Kipligat, “Reaching the 1985 Nairobi Agreement”, in L. Okello (Ed.), *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace; Initiatives to End Violence in Northern Uganda* (London: Conciliation Resources and Kacoke Madit, 2002), 25.

⁶⁰⁶ At the time of writing this work, the government of Uganda under Museveni and the LRA of Joseph Kony were looked up in peace negotiations. However there is skepticism that this may not work because of suspicions by LRA delegates that Museveni simply wants to portray a different face to the International Community that he wants to end war through peace negotiations which is not so because of what he did in 1985 to Okello (An Acholi).

This hatred of the Acholi and the playing up of the “Luwero Triangle” hysteria led to many ordinary Acholi people (then referred to as ‘Ba-choli or Anyanya’) to be killed mercilessly in parts of Buganda. Therefore, although Museveni had benefited greatly from the Acholi rebellion against Obote, he rejected any settlement where he could have shared political power with the Acholi. The ethnic manipulation of the Acholi, first by Obote and, later, by Yoweri Museveni is testimony to the fact that the post-independence political elite would only adopt political formulae acceptable and beneficial to them at the expense of the other groups. Marginalized groups would always resort to violent means to capture state power, leading to conflict. Politics of ethnic instrumentalism largely accounts for the conflicts in post-colonial period.

The civil war in the “Luwero Triangle” between Obote and his UNLA and Yoweri Museveni’s NRA was the result of failure by all the political leaders since Uganda’s independence to rise above ethnic and religious divisions and organize the country along democratic lines. Instead, the Uganda political elite continued the politics of ‘divide and rule’, especially the politics that increased the divide between the south and the north of the country.

Museveni and the NRA’s rise to power and Continued conflict in parts of Uganda

After intensive negotiations in Nairobi chaired by Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi, Okello and Yoweri Museveni’s NRM signed the Nairobi Accord in December 1985. However, after only a few weeks, the peace accord fell apart when the NRM complained that the Military Council under Tito Okello had not honoured its terms. In the first place, the Military Council was accused of taking

unilateral decisions on major matters of policy and administration and made a number of key appointments in sectors of government and society without consulting the NRM. Besides, the Military Council flew in thousands of former Amin soldiers, many of them former Anyanya fighters from Sudan and Zaire (DRC), and from West Nile to the Central Province and reintegrated them into the UNLA, contrary to the terms of the Accord⁶⁰⁷. Between September 1985 and January 1986, the NRA intensified its activities, leading to the capture of power on 26, January 1986. The NRA victory in Uganda was quite unusual and unique in Africa. It was the first successful overthrow of an indigenous government by a locally based guerilla movement.

In contrast to the Military Commission, the NRA/M of Yoweri Museveni exhibited political astuteness and used every opportunity to maximum advantage. Although when he first went to the bush, Museveni claimed that it was because Obote had rigged the elections, when Obote was overthrown, he still refused to abandon his guerilla offensive, alleging that the new government was committing human rights violations and that he himself would change the system.

The most striking characteristic of President Museveni's early moves as President was his manipulation of ethnic and linguistic factors for political ends. Although he made general statements of his opposition to "tribalism" for the benefit of the international media, within the country, he presented the struggle for power as a confrontation between Bantu and non-Bantu speakers

⁶⁰⁷ W. Gazozo, "Point and Counter-point in Uganda" in *AfricAsia*, 9, (1986), 43-44.

and, more specifically, as a struggle between southerners and northerners⁶⁰⁸. He claimed that what he termed the ‘political mess’ in Uganda had been brought about by the mismanagement of the country, ever since independence, under the political leadership of people from the north. This was clearly an example of stereotyping.

Museveni’s appeal to ethnic and linguistic loyalties proved very successful in winning him support and he was able to build up his army’s numbers, first in the bush and later as president. His outburst against the Acholi and reference to past leaders as “swine”, or “primitive” or “pigs” made the northerners hostile to his government.⁶⁰⁹

The NRA victory did not lead to immediate peace in all parts of Uganda. In eastern Uganda, the Uganda Peoples Army (UPA) opposed the new government with military means from 1987 to 1992.⁶¹⁰ When this insurgency eventually died down, remaining factions joined rebels in northern Uganda.⁶¹¹ In the West Nile region, the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF), a rebel group that was formed after Amin’s fall from power, signed a peace pact with Museveni and the new government. Splinter groups, notably the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF) and

⁶⁰⁸ A. Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890-1985*, 176 states that Museveni’s reference to past leaders negatively has become common in his speeches especially on NRA Liberation days (26 Jan.) of every year. As he praises his NRM for the achievements, he always makes derogatory reference to past leaders especially Obote, Okello and Amin as problems that Uganda had for leaders.

⁶⁰⁹ *The Monitor Newspaper* 1992, October.

⁶¹⁰ J. de Berry, “Life after loss: an Anthropological Study of Post-war Recovery in Teso, Eastern Uganda, With special reference to young people”, London School of Economics and Political Science (PhD Thesis), 2000, 66.

⁶¹¹ A.G. G. Ginyera Pincywa, *Northern Uganda in National Politics*, 22.

the Uganda National Rescue Front II (UNRF II), however, continued the armed resistance.⁶¹²

In Western Uganda, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) came into being, with bases located in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and then there was the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU), also in western Uganda. At the time of writing, both ADF and NALU have seriously been weakened.

In northeastern Uganda, heavily armed Karamojong cattle rustlers have remained a problem to the NRA, while in Lira district, the homeland of Milton Obote, there were clashes between the Uganda army and police and a rebel group calling itself the Citizens' Army for Multiparty Politics (CAMP). This movement was, however, crushed.⁶¹³ Other, but now defunct post-Obote 'rebel' movements included the Ninth Obote Movement (NOM),⁶¹⁴ and Force Obote Back Again (FOBA).

The most serious resistance that the NRA/NRM government has faced since 1986 came from different rebel groups in Acholiland. From 1986 to 2006, northern Uganda and especially Acholiland has been the centre of armed resistance and military battles. The 1997 study by Robert Gersony entitled *The*

⁶¹² M. Leopold, "The War in the North-- Ethnicity in Uganda" in T. Allen and J. Seaton (Eds.), *The Media in Conflict: War Reporting and Representations of Ethnic Violence* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 221. See also T. Ofscansky, "War-fare and Instability along the Sudan-Uganda border: A look at the 20th Century" in J. Spaulding & S. Boswick (Eds.), *White Nile, Black Blood: War, Leadership and Ethnicity from Khartoum to Kampala*, (Asmara: The Red Sea Press Inc., 2000), 195-208.

⁶¹³ *The Monitor* 10 Nov. 1999, *The New Vision* 1999, 23 Nov.

⁶¹⁴ Amnesty International Uganda: *The Failures to Safeguard Human Rights* (London: Amnesty International, 1992), 16.

Anguish of Northern Uganda argued that conflict in the north was, in fact, a continuation of the war in the “Luwero Triangle”. Gersony argues:

In a sense the struggle initiated by the NRA in Luwero in the early 1980s has never been concluded. It continued in Luwero through 1985. In early 1986, it was fought in Kampala and has continued in Gulu and Kitgum since that time. In essence the opposing parties remain the same, as do some of the tactics.⁶¹⁵

The next chapter analyses the causes of conflict in Acholiland between 1986 and 2006.

In conclusion, conflict that has bedeviled post-colonial Uganda is largely about political power, which according to the NRM government (1986 to date), has been held for too long by the ‘northerners’. Ethnicity has been used in mobilization by one group in power against the other. While Obote, for example, tried to isolate the Baganda and make them appear to be the most dangerous political problem for independent Uganda, successive governments after him, and especially the Amin and Museveni governments have portrayed the problem of Uganda as essentially caused by northerners, but especially by Acholi political-military dominance. President Museveni, especially, believes that all the Acholi people were/are part of the wrongs done by the Acholi soldiers in the South since independence. In this way, ethnicity is instrumentalized for selfish political ends. Such politics has led to polarization along ethnic lines, leading to the conflictual post-independence history associated with Uganda. It is the playing out of this ethnic and religious politics

⁶¹⁵ R. Gersony, *The Anguish of Northern Uganda*, 12.



that was at the base of the fragmentation and what Ogenga-Otunnu refers to as the “fractured state”.⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁶ Ogenga-Otunnu, “Causes and Consequences of the War in Acholiland”, in Okello Lucima (Ed.), *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to End the Violence in Northern Uganda*, (London: Conciliation Resources and Kacoke Madit, 2002), 20.

**CAUSES AND THE DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT IN
ACHOLILAND, 1986-2006**

Introduction

The National Resistance Movement Army (NRM/A) led by Yoweri Museveni came to power in 1986 promising to restore security to the people of Uganda after 14 years of tyranny and massive violation of human rights. At his swearing-in ceremony as president, Museveni stated:

The second point on our programme is security of person and property. Every person in Uganda must have absolute security to live wherever he wants. Any individual or any group who threatens the security of our people must be smashed without mercy. The people of Uganda should die only from natural causes which are beyond our control, but not from fellow human beings who continue to walk the length and breadth of our land.⁶¹⁷

To the contrary, not every part of Uganda has enjoyed peace, security and human rights as promised by President Museveni in 1986. While, most Ugandans south of the River Nile⁶¹⁸ have enjoyed greater levels of security and prosperity as a result of relative peace since the NRM/NRA came to power in 1986, the conflict in Acholiland defies this trend. Since 1986, violent conflict has gripped the sub-region of northern Uganda, referred to locally as Acholi or Acholiland. Conflict in this sub-region has resulted in the abduction of almost 10,000 children, widespread human rights violations, the destruction of social and economic infrastructure, and displacement of over half the population—many of whom live in life-threatening conditions in the so-called protection

⁶¹⁷ *BBC Summary of World Broadcast*, ME/8171/B/8, 31 January, 1986.

⁶¹⁸ River Nile makes a geographical divide between Southern and Northern Uganda at Karuma. Acholiland lies in the geographical north of Uganda

villages.⁶¹⁹ This chapter will analyze the causes and dynamics of conflict in Acholiland between 1986 and 2006. 2006 is important because conflict has subsided since then as a result of attempts towards peaceful settlement of the conflict.

The rebellion in Acholiland

The conflict in Acholiland in northern Uganda raged on from 1986 with several rebel groups emerging to fight the government of General Yoweri Museveni. The groups that emerged include; the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA), led by Brig. Odong Latek, the Holy Spirit Movement Forces (HSMF), led by self-styled prophetess-Alice Auma Lakwena, the Holy Spirit Movement II (HSM II), led by Alice's father-Severino Lukoya Kiberu, and the Uganda Christian Democratic Army (UCDA), led by Joseph Kony.⁶²⁰

Between 1986 and 2006, conflict in the Acholi region of northern Uganda has undergone major transformations. As soon as the NRM took over the main urban areas of Acholiland around March 1986, the regime launched a major witch hunt for the Acholi Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) soldiers who had fled from Kampala with their weapons.⁶²¹ The defeated UNLA soldiers fled from Kampala largely because of fear of revenge by the NRA who they had engaged in several military battles in the Luwero Triangle in Buganda between

⁶¹⁹ The exact number of internally displaced people is still a contestation and government is currently trying to come out with exact numbers when these people return to their homes.

⁶²⁰ The UCDA led by Joseph Kony changed names several times between 1988 and 1991 before it adopted its current names of Lords Resistance Army. It is the LRA that has engaged the government of Uganda and its forces longer till this day.

⁶²¹ M. L. Pirouet, "Human Rights in Museveni's Uganda", in: H.H. Bernt & M. Twaddle (Eds.), *Changing Uganda: The Dilemmas of Structural Adjustment and Revolutionary Change*, (London: James Currey, 1991), 97. See also Frank-Van Acker, "Uganda: The Lords Resistance Army, The New Order No One Ordered".

1981 and 1985. The Acholi and Langi-dominated UNLA had been used especially by Obote and, later, by Tito Okello to maintain their grip on power. To make matters worse, the “popular” perception in the south, that almost everybody from northern Uganda, especially the Acholi, was ‘Anyanya’ made Acholi soldiers and people from that region terribly insecure⁶²². This constituted a threat that made many Acholi ex-UNLA soldiers and youth to join rebel ranks against the NRM government. The first rebel group (UPDA) was therefore formed out of UNLA Generals and unskilled youth who had joined due to threats by the NRA.

The second transformation was a spiritually inspired peasant rebellion led by Alice Auma Lakwena. A study carried out in 1996 by Charles Asowa of Makerere University and Bertha Amisi of Emergencies Response Information Centre, Action Aid-Kenya, on “The Impact of Peace in Northern Uganda: A search for solutions” pointed to the emergence of a reform movement in the form of a peasant rebellion. The study points out that the objective of this new movement was to deal with the consequences of the Luwero war and the war that had started in Acholiland. Accordingly, the report emphasizes that the rebellion began by Alice Auma Lakwena was intended to “cleanse the Acholi society from within and possibly eradicate witchcraft and sorcery”.⁶²³ However, even when Alice Auma Lakwena claimed so, the rebellion had military and political implications. As Weeks Willet (2002) rightly notes,

⁶²² J. Mugaju & Oloka-Onyango (Eds.), *No Party Democracy in Uganda: Myths and Realities*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2000), 112.

⁶²³ Action Aid, *Report of the Two-day Conference on the Challenges for Peace in Northern Uganda: A Search for Solution*, (Kampala, Action Aid, 1997).

The emergence of armed prophetic movements in Acholi in early 1986 coincided with a period of political uncertainty and upheaval within Acholiland and between the Acholi and the rest of Uganda, including their relationship with the central government (NRM) in particular.⁶²⁴

The Holy Spirit Movement Forces (HSMF) attracted the political and military elite from outside Acholiland like Lango, Teso and Budama in Tororo district of Eastern Ugandan who had either been members of the defunct UNLA or the Obote II regime deposed by Tito Okello. The HSMF philosophy included “using religion, cleansing ex-soldiers and general society of witchcraft and sorcery”.⁶²⁵ Its leaders told rebels that the stones they threw against the NRA enemy would explode like grenades, and nut oil smeared on their bodies would deflect NRA bullets. A hymn-singing semi-circle of rebels would advance towards the NRA and as the first line fell, the line behind would step over the bodies creating an apparently invisible advancing wall.⁶²⁶ Using these quasi-religious methods, the HSMF easily attracted a following from the illiterate rural population as well as frustrated ex-UNLA military elite. The HSMF rebels reached within 100 kms of Kampala before they were defeated by the NRA. Much as it was a broader organization than the UPDA, it did not go beyond the Nilotic ethnic ‘groups in the northern and north-eastern Uganda.

The main difference between the UNLA/UPDA and HSMF of Alice Auma Lakwena is that while the former fought in order to regain recognition in the sharing of power in Kampala, which they had sought through the Nairobi Peace

⁶²⁴ W. Willet, “Pushing the Envelope”, 62.

⁶²⁵ S.S. Kayunga, “The Impact of Armed Opposition on the Movement System in Uganda”, in J. Mugaju & J. Oloka-Onyango (Eds.), *No-Party Democracy in Uganda: Myths and Realities*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2000), 113.

⁶²⁶ A. Borzello, “The Rebels and the Convent Girls”, *Electronic Mail and Guardians*, (Johannesburg: South Africa, 1997), 16.

talks of 1985-6, the latter wanted reform and spiritual purification of the Acholi and other Ugandan communities.

The third transformation was the amalgamation of both the Uganda Peoples' Democratic Army (UPDA) and Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF) into Joseph Kony's Lords Resistance Army. It is this group under Joseph Kony that continued to wreck havoc in Acholi up to 2006. There have been many efforts to broker peace since 2007.⁶²⁷

Another major transformation in this conflict was its intersection with other conflicts in the region. Although the causes of conflict in northern Uganda and southern Sudan are varied, the conflicts became interlinked over time. Southern Sudan was home to different rebel militia groups; the largest being the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA) of John Garang opposed to the Arab dominated Khartoum government under General Omar Bashir and the Lords Resistance Army of Joseph Kony. Since 1994, the Lords Resistance Army's (LRA) known support came from the Sudanese government in retaliation for Uganda government's support of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement/Army insurgency. In October 2002, the Lords Resistance Army helped the Sudanese government recapture the Sudanese garrison town of Torit from the SPLM/SPLA. As a reward, the Sudanese government supplied LRA with arms and ammunition, including anti-tank landmines.⁶²⁸

⁶²⁷ At the time of writing this work, the government of Southern Sudan was still persuading Joseph Kony to sign a peace deal after protracted negotiations at JUBA under the chairmanship of Southern Sudan Vice president Riek Machar.

⁶²⁸ See *International Crisis Group-Africa Report*, 77, 2004, 7.

Although the government of Uganda repeatedly denied giving political support to the SPLA/SPLM, it is well documented fact that Uganda gave military assistance to the SPLM/SPLA, including the deployment of the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF) inside Southern Sudan which enabled the two (SPLA & UPDF) to defeat the Sudan national army and the LRA in the Equatoria and Bahr-El-Ghazal area. They also captured many garrisons of the Sudan army at Yei, and Tonji towns in Southern Sudan.⁶²⁹ As a result of differences between the governments of Uganda and Sudan, LRA benefited as the government of Sudan increased its support for the LRA. It is this support that partly explains why the LRA managed to resist for this long. As Catherine Barnes & Okello Lucima have noted, “from 1994 until recently, the Sudanese government backed the Lord’s Resistance Army (one of the rebel groups in Acholiland) at least in part retaliation for Uganda’s support of the rebel Southern Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA)”.⁶³⁰ Therefore, while there were continuities in the conflict in Acholiland, there were also discontinuities. Similarly, the destruction as a result of the 20 years of conflict cannot be attributed to one rebel group or to the rebel groups in Acholiland alone. The NRA also played a part.

The causes and dynamics of the conflict in Acholiland

The roots of the current conflict between the NRM government of Uganda and the different rebel groups in Acholiland are entwined with the history of conflict in post-independent Uganda and particularly the rise to power of the National Resistance Movement/National Resistance Army. It is deeply rooted in inter-

⁶²⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Abducted and Abused: Renewed conflict in northern Uganda*, 2003, PDF Version downloaded, July 2003, and available online <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/uganda0703>

⁶³⁰ C. Barnes, & L. Okello, “Introduction” in L. Okello (Ed.), *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to End the Violence in Northern Uganda*, (London: Conciliation Resources, 2002).

ethnic competition for power in both government and military. The conditions for this competition were largely set during colonial rule and it has since been manipulated by the different post-independence Uganda governments. At the national level, the conflict in Acholiland is rooted in Uganda's challenge of developing a legitimate system of governance that promotes the collective aspirations of its plural society. Political conflict, historically organized along ethnic, regional and religious lines, has repeatedly undermined Uganda's 'nation building' project. The conflict in Acholiland began soon after Uganda's last regime change in January 1986, when the NRM/A took power after five years of insurgency by overthrowing a military government led by Tito Okello Lutwa, a General from Acholi. It was triggered by the NRM's methods for consolidating control over the northern part of Uganda. Such methods met divergent responses from the Acholi.

Until the NRM came to power in 1986, the economic and political pattern between the north and south regions of Uganda was such that the Acholi-Langi had dominated the military while the southerners had remained key holders of vital offices and the economy. This was the legacy of British colonial rule and its policy of divide and rule which immediate post-independent Uganda leaders simply reinforced. The British regarded the northern part of Uganda as a problem area. At that time, they described it as "a disturbed area, hostile territory, in which there were some tribes powerful enough to offer stiff and prolonged resistance" to their occupation".⁶³¹

⁶³¹ J. P. Berber, "The Moving Frontier of British Imperialism in Northern Uganda, 30-36.

The matter was exacerbated by the infusion of large amounts of weaponry from Ethiopia. Thus, when the British decided to take control of the north, it was out of its concerns to secure the south and west of the country then regarded as the productive areas, which it effectively did and where it wanted to install immediate administration. Until 1921, therefore, the area called the north (Acholiland included) was under military occupation by the Northern Garrison. There was then an assumption of power and authority over the area “in which the tribes had no say”.⁶³² This historical background and the fact that Uganda was unevenly developed by the British colonizers led to the ‘North-South’ divide in which the north was used as labour reservoir, creating the south as a producer of cash crops. The ‘North-South’ divide, therefore, results from an economic imbalance that suited the objectives of the colonial leaders. Unfortunately post-colonial leaders in Uganda have carried on with this.

Between 1894 and 1945 the colonial Kings African Rifles (KAR) was a relatively balanced military force representing a cross section of Ugandan society. Ugandans from both the North and South were recruited into the British colonial armed forces (KAR), but this changed radically after 1945. After World War II, the British realized that most of the Ex-Service men who had been at the vanguard of the anti-colonial struggle in several parts of Africa were interested in movements to refrain their lost independence. In Uganda the problem was that several ex-servicemen were from the south of the country, from a region where the educational and economic elite was also concentrated.⁶³³ Fearing the

⁶³² J. P. Berber, “The Moving Frontier of British Imperialism in Northern Uganda”, 30-36.

⁶³³ S. S. Kayunga, “The Impact of Armed Opposition on the Movement System in Uganda”, 111.

consequences if that region also had large numbers of trained soldiers, the British began to recruit mainly from the Acholi, Langi and West-Nile in the north. Consequently, the Acholi and West Nile ethnic groups came to dominate the KAR. In this way, however the British had created a balance of power between an elite largely drawn from the south and an army or military elites from the north.

The economic divide was also such that industrial development and cash crop production were for the south, while the north was kept as labour reservoir. While one may argue that the British had created a balanced political-military and economic situation devoid of conflict, these policies still created an intractable challenge to building a united nation state when independence came on 9th October 1962 largely because of failure by post-independent leaders to reunite the country. The Acholi, in particular, had been told by the British colonial masters that they had been warriors, effectively transforming them into a military ethnocracy.⁶³⁴ Besides, military service became the principal source of livelihood for thousands of families in northern Uganda. The post-colonial governments of Obote and Idi Amin, both from the north, found this formula politically expedient, which, in turn, further fuelled ethnic polarization and the militarisation of politics.

When the NRM came to power in 1986, the above political formula was also overthrown. The NRA, a southern-dominated guerilla army, became the new

⁶³⁴ S. Lwanga-Lunyiigo, "The Colonial Roots of Internal Conflict" 28-29. See also a. Omara-Otunnu *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1890-1985*, 32-33.

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national army. This change in the political-military pattern meant that the economic livelihood of thousands of Acholi people who had hitherto depended on the army was significantly affected. Worse still, the popular view in the south and especially Kampala that almost everybody from northern Uganda, especially Acholiland, was “Anyanya,”⁶³⁵ made the people from the region terribly insecure. It was this sense of political, social and economic insecurity that the sponsors of insurgency in Acholiland capitalized upon to start rebellion. The defeated Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) soldiers who had fled to northern Uganda and formed the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA) exploited this situation to start rebellion against the NRA/NRM government. It was this force which invaded Uganda and attacked the newly victorious NRA on 22 August 1986.⁶³⁶ The central factor therefore remains the shift in military and political balance from north to south and how this left the many former Acholi soldiers helpless and unemployed. The NRA victory had ended Acholi military dominance before and after independence. Young Acholi men had few job prospects other than the army and this partly explains why they were easily lured into one or the other of the different rebel movements that sprang up in Acholiland against the NRA/NRM.

The failure by the colonial and, later, post-colonial governments, to integrate Acholiland into the productive south also accounts for the current conflict. During the 68 years of British colonialism in Uganda, Acholiland was marginal in many ways. First, it was widely viewed as occupied by a tribe of a quite

⁶³⁵ Anyanya are a Southern Sudan tribe. To refer to the Acholi and northerners in general as ‘Anyanya’ was to imply that they were not Ugandans, and who had no place in Uganda’s politics.

⁶³⁶ S. S. Kayunga, “Impact of Armed opposition on the Movement system in Uganda”, 112. See also International Crisis Group, *Africa Report*, 77, 2004, 7-8.

different and inferior order. Hence, the Acholi were perceived to have little to contribute to the development of the colonial economy⁶³⁷. It was out of this that Acholiland was regarded as a labour reservoir for the south. Besides, they were to serve in the security forces because they were “a martial tribe, with superior physique, good habits of discipline and unsophisticated outlook”⁶³⁸. As a result, Acholiland was left to lag behind economically. When colonial rule ended in 1962, the Acholi had more soldiers in the national army than any other Ugandan ethnic group, and their prominence in the Ugandan national army grew after independence.

Economically, Acholiland remained poor during the colonial and in the immediate post-colonial periods. The prosperity of the south, especially the sugar plantations in Kakira and Lugazi, was largely because of their labour. By 1963, there was no industry in Acholi, except the two cotton ginneries owned by the West Acholi Co-operative Union. The trading sector, by (1963) consisted of 556 traders, of whom 445 were Africans. A year later, the number of African traders had risen to 507.⁶³⁹ Translated into political terms, these regional imbalances enriched the producing areas and impoverished the labour supply areas (the north), thereby increasing the potential for violence.

By accepting the structure of politics organized and crafted by the colonialists under the ‘divide and rule policies’, the Ugandan leaders failed to avoid the ethnicisation of politics in the country, which has torn down the fabric of the

⁶³⁷ R. R. Atkinson, *The Origin of the Acholi of Uganda*, 4.

⁶³⁸ F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 178-181 & 218.

⁶³⁹ C. Leys, *Politicians and Policies: Essay on Politics in Acholi*, 15.

Uganda society, leading to conditions of conflict all round. The civil war that raged on in Luwero between 1981 and 1985, just like conflict in Acholiland, between 1986 and 2006, was a product of this failure of all the political leaders since Uganda's independence to rise above ethnic and religious divisions and organize the country along democratic lines. Rather than continue the "blame politics" and especially blame of the colonialists for what Acholiland is, one should question the role of post-colonial leaders. Nationalists in Uganda should have combated that division and differential economic development by uniting the people, promoting equal development opportunities because that is what nationalism is supposed to achieve. In Uganda it was just the opposite.

Uganda's leaders from the north, starting with Milton Obote and, later, Idi Amin failed to reverse this trend and integrate the Acholi into the South. For the period he was in power, Obote exploited Acholi dominance in the army to keep hold of power. Obote's undemocratic political manoeuvres, which exploited ethnic and religious differences, were reminiscent of the "divide and rule" politics of the British. His political strength was based on playing both ethnic and religious differences to win support from the east, the west and parts of the north by manipulating these divisions. He used the same manipulation in the army, which Museveni has continued to deploy.

With Amin's coup in 1971, the Acholi's special access to the military turned into a deadly liability. From the early stages of the coup, the Acholi and Langi were marked as enemies and bore a heavy share of the brutality and killing that Amin's men rained upon the country. After Idi Amin's overthrow in 1979 (with

Acholi soldiers playing a prominent role), Acholi ethnic identity throughout the 1980s alternatively offered opportunity or danger as one regime gave way to another in a spiral of political violence played out, all too often, in ethnic terms. Some Acholi interviewed are of the opinion that Milton Obote's second regime (1980-1985) was the worst time for the Acholi soldiers in the UNLA. Acholi soldiers who formed the majority in the infantry were made to fight the NRA in Luwero triangle for what they considered Obote's political ends. Obote relied on a small core of officers from his Lango tribe for top army posts. They give the example of Captain Ageta who was put in-charge of the newly created 'Reconnaissance Unit' in Luwero and never took orders from Brigadier Bazilo Okello, an Acholi.

Obote also appointed his cousin Brigadier Smith Opon Acan to the influential position of Army Chief of Staff following death of David Oyite Ojok in 1984. Oyite, like Opon- Acak were both Langi and cousins to Obote⁶⁴⁰. He did this for his political survival, not respecting the fact that he had exposed the Acholi to hatred by other tribes. Indeed as Pain (1997) put it "It is true that for his political survival, he (Obote) began to look at the Acholi officers in the UNLA as being rather independent of his political motivations and therefore a danger to his rule".⁶⁴¹

Since the rise to power of NRM under Yoweri Museveni until 2006, Acholiland never enjoyed peace. The area has seen a wave of insurgency as one rebel

⁶⁴⁰ Interview with P. Mulira, October, 2007.

⁶⁴¹ P. Denis, "Bending Spears", Quoted in *The Hidden War; the Forgotten People* (Kampala: Huripec, 2003), 29.

movement rose and gave rise to another. The NRA entered Acholiland as conquerors and not liberators as was the case in the south. In the south, Museveni fought to liberate the Bantu from ‘northern domination’ and poor leadership from the north. As he stated in an interview to *Drum Magazine*, “The problem in Uganda is that leadership has mainly been from the north. The southerners, who are mainly Bantu, played a peripheral role all those years since independence in 1962”.⁶⁴²

Whereas it is true that Obote, Idi Amin and Tito Okello were from northern Uganda, reconciliatory politics and leadership dictate against such ethnicised statements. The end result was failure to integrate the North to the South leading to conflict. Today, under the NRM, there is a Ministry for Northern Uganda but little has been done to integrate the north to the south. Such negative attitude by the NRM leadership, unfortunately also led to the Acholi negative attitude of the NRM and Museveni. As Evelyn Grace Anywar, a performing artist and an Acholi based in Nairobi put it. “The Acholi feel rejected. The Acholi feel hated. They feel unwanted. In their every day life, young Acholi feel excluded from Ugandan citizenship”.⁶⁴³ In such a state, most of them got lured easily to different rebel groups.

Whereas the above stated position reflects the mood and attitude of Acholi people towards the NRM, it also illustrates their role in the current conflict. Their failure to come to terms with the changes ushered in by the new NRM

⁶⁴² *Drum (East) Magazine*, 9

⁶⁴³ Quoted in M. Leopold, “The War in the North”, 228.

government in 1986, especially their displacement from controlling the military; which they had dominated since 1945, partly accounts for their positive response to the different rebel groups that sprang in Acholi. In explaining the emergence of armed prophetic movements in Acholiland in early 1986, Willet Weeks states that “the emergence of armed prophetic resistance coincided with a period of political uncertainty and upheavals within Acholi and between the Acholi and the rest of Uganda; including their relationship with their central government (NRM) in particular”.⁶⁴⁴

In this case, and, as Heike Behrend also notes, the actions of political players and their servants in the military had provided the preconditions for the catastrophic situation in Acholi i.e. the state of conflict.⁶⁴⁵ The period 1986 to 2006 has been the most tumultuous for the Acholi military elite and peasants alike.

The NRM under Y. Museveni and Conflict in Acholiland 1986-2006

The NRA/M seizure of power in 1986 effectively meant that, for the first time since independence in 1962, socio-economic, political, military powers and political leadership shifted from the North. This development produced a great deal of resentment against Museveni for having displaced a Northerner, Tito Okello, from power. According to Ogenga Otunnu, the new administration (NRM), which absorbed political and military groups from the South and Moses

⁶⁴⁴ W. Willet, “Pushing the Envelope, Moving Beyond Protected Villages in Northern Uganda”27.

⁶⁴⁵ H. Behrend, *War in Northern Uganda: The Holy Spirit Movement of Alice Lakwena*.

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Ali's Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF) from West Nile, then engaged in intensive anti Acholi propaganda. The leader of this negative propaganda on the Acholi was President Museveni himself⁶⁴⁶.

In his book, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, Museveni argues passionately that the Acholi people as a whole had participated in the looting of the South, almost qualifying Ogenga Otunnu's views above. As Museveni states:

You could not say that they were fighting to bring resources to the north, other than by way of looting and corruption; for social corruption had widely taken root in the region (Acholiland). Under previous regimes (Obote and Okello), the soldiers, most of whom came from the north, had been free to loot civilian property. Whenever they looted, they would take them (loot) to their homes and their parents would not ask where they obtained them . . . In this way the whole community in Acholi and Lango became involved in the plundering of Ugandans from the south for themselves.⁶⁴⁷

This kind of attitude about the Acholi as a whole reflects how far Uganda politics has been ethnicised. While it is true that certain Acholi individuals in the army may have looted, it is not justified to conclude that the entire Acholi community benefited and supported such actions. Such politics of ethnic stereotyping only increased fear among the Acholi, especially the youth and ex-soldiers who, henceforth, joined different rebel groups against the NRM governments. As Odong-Otoo, Member of Parliament for Pader in Acholi, put it,

while it is true to say that economic hardship in many parts of Uganda, not Acholi alone, forced certain groups of people to join the army, there is no conclusive evidence to prove that the Acholi used their position in the army to loot other parts of Uganda.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁶ Ogenga-Otunnu, "Causes and Consequences of the War in Acholiland", 6.

⁶⁴⁷ Y.K. Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed*, 177-178.

⁶⁴⁸ Interview on 5/May 2007, Kampala.

This illustrates how the NRM also fell prey to colonial and post-colonial politics of ethnic stereotyping and manipulation like previous leaders. The Museveni regime had learnt nothing from the previous mistakes and the end result was continued conflict in Acholiland.

The victorious National Resistance Army entered Gulu in March 1986. According to Caroline Lamwaka, Ogenga-Otunnu, Catherine Barnes and Okello Lucima,⁶⁴⁹ at first, the NRA, soldiers in Gulu were well-disciplined and respectful. However, within a short time, serious breakdown in discipline occurred among the National Resistance Army and the other forces like Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM) and Federal Movement of Uganda (FEDEMU) that had joined the NRM.

First, the NRM regime launched a witch hunt for the Acholi UNLA soldiers who had fled from Kampala with their weapons. Immediately the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) forces, then largely Acholi, were defeated at the battle of Katonga River in January 1986, most UNLA Acholi and Langi soldiers sensed danger and began to leave Kampala for their homeland in northern Uganda, carrying along with them their property and families.⁶⁵⁰ Most of them feared that the victorious NRA forces and the Baganda based movements like UFM and FEDEMU might revenge for the atrocities they were accused of in the Luwero

⁶⁴⁹ C. Lamwaka, "The Peace process in northern Uganda, 1986-1990". See also Ogenga-Otunnu, "Causes and Consequences of the War in Acholiland", and C. Barnes and L. Okello (Eds.), *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace*.

⁶⁵⁰ A. B. K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*.

Triangle in Buganda and other accusations laid against the Obote II and Okello governments.

As Catherine Barnes and Okello Lucima have noted, the newly victorious army comprised poorly integrated units like FEDEMU,⁶⁵¹ which were indisciplined and bent on revenge. Being largely composed of Baganda who wanted the return of the Kabaka and accused the Acholi for their role in destroying Buganda Kingdom and exiling of their Kabaka Mutesa I, FEDEMU resorted to direct revenge against the Acholi. After 1986, some errant NRA officers who were bent on revenge mistreated the surrendering ex-soldiers. George Kanyeihamba has observed, elsewhere that,

the NRA High Command was to make an error by entrusting one of these joining groups (FEDEMU) with responsibility of mopping up the remnants of the UNLA in the northern region of Uganda where that group inflicted so much havoc and terror on the population there that the consequences would alienate the majority of the population in that region from the NRM for decades.⁶⁵²

While there was an initial period of relative peace, army units like FEDEMU were responsible for instances of extra-judicial killings and other human rights violation.⁶⁵³ For example, in August 1986, the Federalist Democratic Movement (FEDEMU), a Buganda militia then operating with the National Resistance Army (NRA), massacred 40 civilians in former president Tito Okello's village at Namukora in Kitgum,⁶⁵⁴ partly in retaliation for UNLA killings in Luwero. In July 1987, the NRA executed some 97 civilians in Kona-Kilak in Gulu. In June

⁶⁵¹ Most of the Federal Movement of Uganda (FEDEMU) fighters were Baganda who were hurriedly integrated into the NRA partly to boost their (NRA) numbers and also to win the support of Buganda. Most of them were still bitter and accused the Acholi of the atrocities in Luwero.

⁶⁵² G. Kanyeihamba, *Constitutional and Political Development of Uganda*, 237.

⁶⁵³ C. Barnes & L. Okello (Eds.), *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace*, 1.

⁶⁵⁴ C. Barnes & L. Okello (Eds.), *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace*, 1.

1988, 40 civilians were massacred at Koch Goma.⁶⁵⁵ NRA/FEDEMU atrocities increased suspicions that a war of revenge was being undertaken against the Acholi. At this stage, the understanding of the NRA and FEDEMU was that the defunct Uganda National Army (UNLA) stood for Acholi soldiers. As a result, the destruction that followed Museveni's takeover affected almost all sectors of Acholi to a degree never experienced before.⁶⁵⁶

Besides this witch hunting, there was also what many Acholi informants believe was a deliberate strategy of impoverishing them (Acholi) through looting their cattle. As 80-year old Okello Osira of Padibe put it, "They remove our cattle to make us (the Acholi) poor, to be able to control us".⁶⁵⁷ He claims that he lost between 20-60 heads of cattle at the hands of the NRA and that many lost even more to Karamojong cattle rustlers. Available data provided by veterinary officers in Gulu seems to support the fact that Acholi lost most of the cattle stock in the period 1986-1997. Data provided indicates that in 1985, Gulu and Kitgum districts had a total cattle population of 285,000. However, because of cattle raids from the Karamojong and looting, this was reduced to approximately 5,000 heads by 1997.⁶⁵⁸ The social outcome of this was that in their everyday life, ex-Acholi soldiers and young and elderly people in Acholiland felt excluded from Ugandan citizenship.

⁶⁵⁵ For details on this and other forms of torture on the local people see *Human Rights Watch: The Scars of Death: Children Abducted by the LRA in Uganda*, (Sept. 1997).

⁶⁵⁶ Amnesty International *Uganda: The Failure to Safeguard Human Rights*, 1992.

⁶⁵⁷ Interview with Okello-Osira, October 2007.

⁶⁵⁸ Quoted in *Huripec Report*, 70.

A senior government official from Acholiland, talking on condition of anonymity, believes also that the NRM victory produced a great deal of resentment against Museveni for having displaced an Acholi, Tito Okello, from power. He said:

Northerners and Acholi in particular felt cheated by the British who had used them in the King's African Rifles and the Baganda during colonial rule. This second cheat (because they helped overthrow Obote in 1985) by Museveni made us feel even more bitter.⁶⁵⁹

Acholi elite in Kacoke Madit meeting⁶⁶⁰ in London between 17th & 19th July 1998 also questioned why war had persisted in Acholiland even when other areas like West Nile, Teso had been pacified. In this way, the historical fault line of ethnic politics had re-emerged.

Talking about the discipline of the NRA in Acholiland, President Yoweri Museveni's half brother Salim Saleh, then commanding the conquest of Acholiland, is quoted to have said that "In August 1986, the NRA 35th Battalion under Andrew Kayiira (a Muganda) and leader of (FEDEMU) then deployed in Kitgum committed mistakes against the population after being attacked by the UPDA in the area of Namukora". He admits that "this act tarnished the otherwise unblemished discipline track record of the NRA".⁶⁶¹

Although there is room to argue that indiscipline may not have been as a result of official government policy against the Acholi, it had far-reaching effects largely because of the history of ethnic abuse and provocations that had been

⁶⁵⁹ Interview, 30 June 2007, Kampala.

⁶⁶⁰ Kacoke-Madit or big meeting of Acholi in the diaspora 17-19 July 1998.

⁶⁶¹ *New Vision*, Sunday 29th June 2003.

characteristic of Uganda since independence in 1962. Acholi member of Parliament Odong-Otto seems to confirm this when he states that,

It was not the 35th Battalion that was responsible for the Namukora atrocities but NRA dominated by Museveni's Banyankole and Baganda whose main objective was to carry out an ethnic revenge against the Acholi for their alleged dominance of Uganda armed forces and politics before 1986.

He even questioned why the attack on the UPDA became an attack on the ordinary people who were caught in between the early spontaneous rebellions even before the UPDA appeared in the area.⁶⁶²

The point to be made from the above is that, while the NRA's behaviour and thirst for revenge partly accounts for the conflict in Acholiland, it also relates to the problem of the militarization of the Ugandan society after independence. Since Independence in 1962, security forces in Uganda acquired an identity of their own, with civilian control non-existent. Besides, competition concerning which ethnic groups would form the constituent core of the security forces drove a history of violent political change. To enjoy the benefits of the state or access to top political positions and power, the control of the security forces has been so crucial in Uganda. As Acker Frank has noted,

In practice, Uganda's modern history has been an example of the state using its authoritative mechanisms (the military) to identify and exclude from its enjoyment groups of people, 'internal outsiders' from within the national boundaries.⁶⁶³

The history of marginalization in key sectors has been driven by the selective composition and use of the army; turning the military into a vehicle of domestic

⁶⁶² Interview with Odong-Otto, 5 May 2007, Kampala.

⁶⁶³ Acker Van Frank, "The Lords Resistance Army: The New Order No One Ordered", 339.

politics. Suffice to say, the conflict in Acholi is partly out of the desire of ex-Acholi soldiers and politicians to regain control of the military (as was till 1986) and to use it as a vehicle of domestic politics. All successive regimes in Uganda have grossly misused the military to achieve their selfish aims.⁶⁶⁴ The case of Uganda illustrates how the state has become the instrument of violent retaliation in the arena of domestic politics. In such a case, the military can be either a public good or a public bane.

Conspiracy theorists believe that the current conflict in Acholiland was well-planned years before the NRM came to power. According to Ndebesa Mwambutsya, Godfrey Asimwe⁶⁶⁵ and Jakayo Ocitti,⁶⁶⁶ the present power brokers in Uganda, NRM leaders, were determined to remove the political “leadership” from the north at all costs. They contend that until that leadership had been taken and secured against any possible reversal, a war against the northerners was to be pursued. The first case they all present is Museveni’s determination to sabotage the 1985/6 Nairobi Peace Talks and to use this as an excuse to buy time and capture Kampala. Thus, it is argued that “Museveni did not place much significance to these talks” and “kept calling the Kampala group bandits, tyrants, killers” as a way to annoy them into walking out of the talks”⁶⁶⁷. It is further contended that Museveni only used the ‘Peace Talks’ period as a delaying tactic until his military group had gained enough strength

⁶⁶⁴ Alfred Obita at the Kacdit meeting- July 17-19th 1998.

⁶⁶⁵ Ndebesa Mwambutsya is a lecturer in Department of History-Makerere University and a political critic. He has advanced such views in seminars and political talk-shows in different F.M Radios and Television. He is also a member of an elite political organization –The Free Think Movement”. Asimwe holds a PhD in Development Studies and Masters Degree in History and is currently the Head of Department of History.

⁶⁶⁶ Prof. Ocitti retired from Makerere University where he served for over 35 years and is currently part-time lecturer in Gulu University. He is an Acholi from Gulu and critic of the Movement government of Museveni.

⁶⁶⁷ Interview with Ndebesa Mwambutsya, 2007.

to strike at the Okello government in Kampala. Indeed, Museveni's negativity to peace talks with the UPDA and other rebels later in 1997 seems to confirm this. In 1997, he openly declared "personally, I want no peace talks with criminals".⁶⁶⁸ When Uganda's sixth Parliament passed the Amnesty Bill in late 1999, as a formal way through which rebels could surrender under state protection, President Museveni at first refused to assent to the Bill arguing: "why should these thugs who kill our people get state protection. We should kill them, we shall kill them off".⁶⁶⁹

Ocitti goes further to argue that the Luo (Acholi are Luo) and the Banyankole (Museveni's tribe) have never co-existed. He then refers to the great migratory times of the Luo, beginning from 1500AD when they crossed into Bunyoro-Kitara Empire of the Bachwezi and the latter simply 'disappeared'. The Chwezi Dynasty that had ruled Bunyoro-Kitara Empire is the historical forefather of today's Banyankole tribe to which Museveni belongs. There is still some mystery as to why this great empire simply crumbled when Luo migrants walked in and occupied the northern part of it. Claims such as this that the Chwezi felt they could not stay in one empire with foreigners (i.e. Luo ancestors) are rife in Uganda's history. While there are different reasons given for the breaking up of the Bachwezi Empire, Ocitti feels that the Bachwezi hatred for the Luo remains paramount. He then concludes that the current conflict is "pay back" time by the offspring of the Bachwezi like Museveni and his Banyankole dominated NRA on the Acholi (as a sub-section of the Luo). Rather

⁶⁶⁸ *East African* 22, March 1999, *The New Vision* 26 April 1999. Quoted in *the Crusader* 29th November 1997.

⁶⁶⁹ *New Vision*, 8, Jan. 2000, See also *East African* 22 March 1999.

than debating the accuracy of such views, what matters is that such views still paint a picture of Uganda's post-independence politics as dominated by ethnicity and its manipulation and stereotyping.

It is true that the current leadership was wary of the part the Acholi had played in the politics and military of Uganda since Independence. The problem was how far they ethnicised this problem as if the entire Acholi, as an ethnic group, had dominated the leadership and army at the expense of other groups. This politicization of ethnicity has been a source of friction and conflict in Uganda.

Other Senior NRA leaders, charged with the duty of executing war in northern Uganda, also fell prey to Museveni's strong views about the Acholi or northerners in general. Having a particular perception is not bad. However perceptions which are too biased about a community in general and which are expressed by leaders can be very dangerous, as this borders on ethnic mistrust and stereotyping. Former Army Commander James Kazini, who took over from Mugisha Muntu in 1998, once stated in reference to war in Acholiland: "If anything, it is local Acholi soldiers causing problems. It is the cultural background of the people here; they are very violent. It's genetic".⁶⁷⁰ The deductions to be made from the above statement and which impact on this study and position on this conflict are several.

⁶⁷⁰ Quoted in *Human Rights Watch*, Sept. 1997, 33.

First is that the NRA soldiers and officers executing the war failed to properly identify the enemy to be dealt with. Right from their victory and takeover of Kampala, the spirit and attitude of the NRA was to revenge against the Acholi who were accused of atrocities in the south and especially in Luwero triangle. Acholi or “Bacholi”⁶⁷¹ were the enemies and not the UNLA soldiers who had engaged the NRA in different battle fields in southern Uganda. As one time Prime Minister Kintu-Musoke (a Muganda) put it, “The Acholi have to pay for what they did in Luwero”.⁶⁷²

The main weakness with views expressed by NRM political heavy weights like the former Prime Minister quoted above is in their failure to identify their ‘real enemy’ and their negativity to reconciliation with the defeated UNLA soldiers for the sake of peace. In addition, the wrongs of the few Acholi soldiers in the UNLA became the wrongs of all Acholi civilians; the elderly, the youth and innocent women, who never participated in the Luwero war. Like Museveni and Kazini, Kintu-Musoke appears convinced of the wrong of the entire Acholi community, yet some informants confirm that most of the dead in Luwero were Acholi soldiers ambushed by NRA as they either passed through Luwero back north or in battle. This stereotyping of Acholi as venal and the bane of Uganda politics is a factor in the conflict.

According to Caroline Lamwaka, NRA soldiers often justified their looting and harassment of civilians as revenge for the abuses allegedly committed by Acholi

⁶⁷¹ “Bacholi” is synonymous with many Acholi. It is a local phrase for Acholi in plural.

⁶⁷² *The Monitor* 1996, 129.

UNLA soldiers in Luwero triangle. They would tell people, “we are recovering our properties from Luwero”.⁶⁷³ This reinforced the perception that the NRA/M viewed people from the north as enemies. The NRM failed to integrate the north since they regarded people from this region as ‘thieves’, ‘murderers’, and ‘backward’. Their brutality forced many local Acholi and ex-soldiers to join one or the other of the different rebel groups that sprang up in Acholiland. The significance of NRA atrocities and attitude have been confirmed by Charles Alai, a former Deputy Minister in Museveni’s government (1995-2000), who claims that he was beaten up as a suspect by the NRA at his home in Gulu and had no option but to join the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army/Movement because his life was threatened.⁶⁷⁴ Andrew Adimola, a senior ex-administrator from Gulu also claims that Bazilio Okello, coup leader against Obote in 1985, would have come out of the bush in 1986 had Museveni not insisted that he should be charged as a criminal.⁶⁷⁵

Against this background of mistrust, in May 1986, the NRM government ordered all former Uganda Army soldiers to report to barracks. The order was met with deep suspicion, in part, because it was reminiscent of Idi Amin’s edict of 1971/72. In 1971/1972 Idi Amin ordered all Acholi and Langi soldiers who had fled Kampala following Obote’s overthrow to return their arms and report to different barracks. Once the soldiers responded positively, many were massacred⁶⁷⁶. Amin’s actions firmly reinforced competitive retaliation on an ethnic basis in Uganda politics because after his fall in 1979, Acholi and Langi

⁶⁷³ C. Lamwaka, “The Peace Process in Northern Uganda, 1986-1997”, 7

⁶⁷⁴ Interview with Charles Alai, Sept. 15, 2007.

⁶⁷⁵ Interview with Charles Alai, Sept. 15, 2007.

⁶⁷⁶ Ogenga Otuunu, “Causes and Consequences of the War in Acholiland”, 4.

soldiers in the UNLA took revenge against the people of West Nile for what Idi Amin had done in 1971/1972. Many Acholi believed that they could hear an echo of this experience when Museveni's NRA ordered UNLA soldiers back to barracks in 1986. Many of them believed that revenge was the basis of this order.

Consequently, some ex-UNLA soldiers went into hiding in Southern Sudan as others took up arms. Most of such ex-soldiers and Acholi youth then joined the Uganda People's Democratic Army of Odong Latek.⁶⁷⁷ A report by International Crisis Group 14 April 2004 also confirms this. The NRA's response to this development worsened the situation because attacks made were not well organized, and hence affected civilians largely. The attack on the UPDA became an attack on ordinary people who were caught up in the spontaneous rebellion.

The NRA war against the UNLA and Okello government also exposed their other weakness that had a bearing to the conflict in Acholiland. When the NRA was at war with Obote II and Okello soldiers between 1981 and 1986, the message by Museveni was that "we want to liberate Ugandans from bandits, tyrants and killers".⁶⁷⁸ This made the NRA to be seen in the south as liberators. In the north, they regarded themselves as conquerors. The message to ex-soldiers, who were largely from Acholiland and Lango, was "they either surrender or we shall crash and kill them". In his public address at PECE stadium in Gulu on 5 May 1988, Museveni promised to 'kill', 'shoot to kill' any rebel or rebel

⁶⁷⁷ Ogenga Otuunu, "Causes and Consequences of the War in Acholiland", 4.

⁶⁷⁸ President Museveni still believes that UNLA and the Obote and Okello regimes stand to be blamed for all the killings in Luwero, and other parts of Uganda, especially the South. He exonerates his NRA and has on several occasions described UNLA soldiers, Acholi and past leaders as "swine or pigs, fools, killers etc".

collaborators or ex-soldiers who did not surrender: Besides, on their assumption of power, the NRM leadership made it clear that the armies they had fought had been defeated and that there was no question of power sharing with them.⁶⁷⁹

Such strong statements from the head of state were regarded by the Acholi as war threats to all of them. He was not reconciliatory at all. The NRA/M then failed to dismantle the belief among the Acholi that the new regime hated all of them. They also failed to convince the elders and local Acholi that their (NRA) targets were the few bad elements in the UNLA. This failure to expose the ex-soldiers and isolate them from the general population made NRA to be seen as enemies of the entire Acholi community.⁶⁸⁰ The NRM/NRA relied heavily on a military rather than political approach in dealing with opposition in Acholiland. Museveni's strategy and solutions did not integrate the people of the north with those of the south but rather accentuated their divisions along ethnic lines, as British colonial rule had done 44 years ago.

Whereas sources within Acholiland and the Acholi community in the Diaspora emphasize internal causes to the conflict and more so the issue of revenge against the entire Acholi community for the atrocities allegedly committed by UNLA soldiers in Luwero, the NRA/NRM government on their part locate the

⁶⁷⁹ These were Museveni's remarks when Uganda Freedom Army and FEDEMU made claims that they had also helped liberate the country. They had suggested that even good elements in UNLA should be integrated.

⁶⁸⁰ Out of accounts of betrayal of the Acholi by various Uganda governments, three episodes stand out: Amin's order in 1972 for all troops to report to barracks and the subsequent ethnic purges; the flouting by the NRM of the Nairobi Peace Accord of 1985 and the belief that the Acholi paved way for Museveni by overthrowing Obote and Museveni paid back by betraying them. Then after the 1988 Peace Agreement with the UPDA, the government followed with major military operations.

beginnings of the conflict in external incursions with the attack on Bibia by the UPDA from Southern Sudan.⁶⁸¹ The point to note, however, is that the involvement of the Sudan government in the conflict should be regarded more as a factor that exacerbated a conflict that was already in progress. The involvement of Sudan began when the rebel Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), acting in concert with the NRM/A government of Uganda, attacked the Uganda Magwi Camp of Acholi refugees inside Sudan. This forced the UNLA soldiers and Bazilio Okello to move the war deep inside Uganda by attacking the NRA contingent at Bibia.⁶⁸²

The first rebel movement that the NRA/NRM faced in Acholiland was the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army/Movement (UPDA/M). It was formed by ex-UNLA generals partly for revenge and in order to reverse the humiliating defeat by the NRA. Besides, its members; who were largely ex-soldiers wanted to regain recognition in the sharing of power. After an unsuccessful military campaign, the UPDA held negotiations with the NRM government that led to a peace agreement in 1988.⁶⁸³

⁶⁸¹ Most government and Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces Documents; some of which are classified contain --such explanations.

⁶⁸² This dimension in the conflict, with the support of the government of Sudan to the rebel UPDA continued and is largely responsible for the continued LRA attacks and military strength till 2006. The Sudanese government has supported the LRA with logistics and military equipment and the LRA established its bases in Southern Sudan located close to military installations of (its army) of the Sudanese government. For details see Amnesty International 1997, Human Rights Watch, 1997, De Termmerman, Els, *Aboke Girls: Children Abducted in Northern Uganda* 2001, and UNICEF/World Vision, *Shattered innocence: Testimonies of Children abducted in Northern Uganda* (Kampala: UNICEF, World Vision Uganda, 1997).

⁶⁸³ This peace deal brought to surface the division in the ranks of the UPDA/M. The London based political wing led by ex-Obote Prime Minister Otema Alimadi was not included in the peace agreement. It was only in 1990 that the government signed peace agreement with Otema Alimadi's faction of the UPDM/A.

From 1988 to 2006, the conflict eventually took on a traditional and modern religious tone in the person of Alice Auma Lakwena and her Holy Spirit Movement Forces (HSMF) as well as Joseph Kony's Lords Resistance Army. This transformation was largely as a result of the weaknesses and failure of UPDA to root out the NRA from Acholiland. Heike Behrend, who has done much research on the HSMF, contends that the UPDA/M had perceived the struggle against the NRA as purely military and not a political struggle. The UPDA equally thought it would recapture power within a very short time. When this failed, disillusionment emerged and this partly explains why it quickly went into peace talks with government.⁶⁸⁴ Followers of the UPDA who initially included many ex-soldiers, who later joined Alice Auma Lakwena, felt that the leadership of the UPDA failed to grasp or even ignored the structural issues that forced people to join the movement in the first instance. The NRA/M solution was to give jobs to some of the UPDA leaders and to integrate some UPDA soldiers into the NRA.

Unfortunately for Alice Auma Lakwena and rebels who joined her movement (HSMF), the struggle was not to get jobs but to cleanse the society and especially Ex-UNLA soldiers, the NRA soldiers and other Ugandans of social injustices like ethnic purges, rape, witchcraft, and sorcery which they believed caused moral decay in Acholiland and Uganda. Alice Auma Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement forces (HSMF), therefore, never thought of armed struggle from a purely militarist perspective and attracted the political and military elite from outside Acholiland, unlike the UPDA. HSMF's philosophy of purification of society significantly appealed to a peasant dominated society where acts of

⁶⁸⁴ H. Behrend, *Is Alice Lakwena a Witch,?* 170-173.

witchcraft were common.⁶⁸⁵ The LRA shared many of Alice Auma Lakwena's rituals and beliefs, including her powerful blending of Christianity and Acholi religion.⁶⁸⁶ After 1990, the conflict acquired an international dimension with the involvement of the government of Sudan under President Omar Bashir in support to the LRA of Joseph Kony. It then became a proxy war because the Sudanese government supported the LRA as a punishment to Uganda because of her close ties to the USA in their fight against the alleged terrorist regime in Sudan.

Alice Auma Lakwena and Holy Spirit Movement Forces (HSMF)

Alice Auma Lakwena's rise, organization and short-lived rebellion against the NRM/NRA has raised debate in different circles. While the Uganda government officials dismissed Alice Lakwena as "a lunatic prostitute of Gulu Town turned witch",⁶⁸⁷ a position echoed by some western journalists like Catherine Bond of the BBC,⁶⁸⁸ Lakwena's followers like Professor Newton Ojok, former Minister of Education-Obote II government, believed that she was "God sent" and with a genuine cause. The aims of the HSMF were different from that of the UNLA Generals who constituted much of the UPDA, although both rebel groups remain part of the history of political developments of post-colonial Uganda.

While the UPDA 'Generals' fought to regain recognition in the sharing of power in Kampala and regain focus after their defeat by the NRA in 1986, the HSMF of

⁶⁸⁵ A. Borzello, "The Rebels and the Convent Girls", 61.

⁶⁸⁶ S. S. Kayunga, "The Impact of Armed opposition on the Movement system in Uganda", 114.

⁶⁸⁷ H. Behrend, *Is Alice Lakwena a Witch?*, 162

⁶⁸⁸ Catherine Watson, a former British journalist of the BBC is quoted in HURUPEC Report, 'The hidden war: the Forgotten People (Kampala: Huripec Report 2003), 43, to have described Alice Lakwena as a "Voodoo priestess" who had wonderful millenarian promises while Catherine Bond regarded her as a former prostitute.

Alice Lakwena were more concerned about wider issues of human rights and governance. Such issues included the role of the armed forces in society, their behaviour towards civilians, and the character of the political leadership in the “peace agreement” of the “Generals” with the NRM government.⁶⁸⁹

Behrend Heike contends that, after returning to their villages, the defeated UNLA Acholi soldiers tried to take up the lives of peasants again but only few succeeded. While in the army, she asserts:

they had learnt to despise the peasants’ way of life and had made an easy living from looting. Conflicts in the villages increased when some of them began looting and raping their neighbours. Worse still, because they had been defeated by the NRA, they were ridiculed by other villagers and were viewed as killers and impure because they had not been cleansed of the blood spilt.⁶⁹⁰

Accordingly, the rebellion by the HSMF of Alice Lakwena was intended to “cleanse the Acholi society from within and possibly eradicate witchcraft and sorcery”.⁶⁹¹ In Behrend’s strong views above, we still find ethnic prejudice characteristic of post-independence politics in Uganda.

The point to note, however, is that the HSMF and Alice Auma Lakwena’s rebellion was not entirely an Acholi ethnic affair. First, she had blamed the Acholi traditional leaders and elders for not living up to their expected responsibilities of disciplining the young soldiers then accused of gross misconduct in the Luwero war. She also blamed the Church for failing to

⁶⁸⁹ HURIPEC Report, (2003), 45.

⁶⁹⁰ H. Behrend, *Is Alice Lakwena a Witch?* 165.

⁶⁹¹ ACTION AID, *Report of the Two-Day Conference on the Challenge for Peace in Northern Uganda: A Search for Solution*, (Kampala: Action Aid, 1997)

contain witchcraft which had intensified and turned inwards to explain increasing death in Acholi on the basis of increased witchcraft accusations.⁶⁹²

The above position stands contrary to President Museveni's position on the Lakwena war. He refers to Alice Lakwena's military activity and support as "tribal opportunism that brought such large numbers to her side",⁶⁹³ when, in fact, the rebellion drew support from other ethnic communities in the east of Uganda. Even when President Museveni believed that Alice Auma did not commit crimes, he still remained proud to say that the NRA was able to "mow down"⁶⁹⁴ thousands of these unarmed young people. The unanswered question is whether he did "mow" them down simply because they were Acholi whom he accused of Luwero atrocities.

The other area which made the HSMF clash with the NRA was the conduct of the victorious NRA soldiers in Acholiland. Heike Behrend tells us that the NRA and FEDEMU soldiers sent to Kitgum took the opportunity to loot, rape, murder and revenge. To escape from this, some of the Acholi ex-soldiers took up arms again and went to the bush to join newly formed rebel groups.⁶⁹⁵ The rise of the Holy Spirit-Movement Forces and Alice Lakwena was, therefore, partly because of the need to cleanse even the NRA and FEDEMU soldiers. The rise of Alice Auma Lakwena and the HSMF as a rebel movement against the NRM government was a consequence of preceding wars. Although itself generating

⁶⁹² HURIPEC Report, 43. See also H. Behrend, *Is Alice Lakwena a Witch?* 165.

⁶⁹³ HURIPEC Report, 43. See also H. Behrend, *Is Alice Lakwena a Witch?* 39.

⁶⁹⁴ When addressing Ugandans on the 15th Anniversary of NR/M victory over Obote forces in 2004 at Kololo Airstrip-Kampala, Museveni referred to the massive death of Lakwena followers in that way, "Mow them down".

⁶⁹⁵ H. Behrend, *Is Alice Lakwena a Witch?* 165.

violence, despair and death, the HSMF nevertheless tried to end this cycle of violence and to heal not only individuals but also society. As Behrend has noted, “Alice Auma Lakwena and the HSMF invented a religious discourse which attempted not only to reconstruct the economy and effect political change but also to create a new moral order and then reconcile the people.”⁶⁹⁶

The HSMF waged war, not only against an external enemy (NRA/M government), but also against internal enemies and against rival resistance movements like the UPDA and the Uganda Peoples Army. The war was also against witches, pagan spirit mediums, and men and women accused of practising witchcraft, as well as against impure soldiers-whether from NRA, UPDA or FEDEMU. Accordingly, anyone who had killed or raped in the course of war or practiced witchcraft was considered impure. Thus, her aim was to cleanse society by destroying government troops accused of evil acts but also people in Acholi who were held responsible for all the evil in the world. Hers was, in the words of Kriger, a war within a war, expressing not only class tensions but also gender and generation tensions.⁶⁹⁷ As a religious discourse, the HSMF emphasized moral rehabilitation and explained the causes and solutions of all the problems of Uganda biblically, urging everyone to turn to “Our Lord Jesus Christ and becoming God-fearing people”.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁶ H. Behrend, “War in Northern Uganda”, in C. Clapham (Ed.), *African Guerilla*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1998), 247.

⁶⁹⁷ N. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerilla War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) also describes a war within a war of liberalisation in Zimbabwe.

⁶⁹⁸ Ex HSMF forces believe that this was the only way of cleansing society, and all soldiers involved in the war; whether NRA, UPDA or FEDEMU.

The approach adopted by the HSMF of Alice Auma Lakwena had a background in Acholi history and religion. During and after the First and Second World Wars, Acholi soldiers in the Kings African Rifles (KAR) returned with cloth, buttons or an insignia of the enemies they had killed and underwent the purification ritual.⁶⁹⁹ But in the confusion of the civil war in Uganda, many UNLA soldiers were unwilling to undergo purification rituals. To Alice Auma Lakwena, such soldiers remained impure and the unspecified spirits of those killed were “regarded as responsible for the misfortune that struck Acholi. The elders, Behrend asserts, regarded the historical fall of Acholi, the loss of state power, the increasing use of witchcraft, as a punishment, a sign of condemnation resulting from a transgression against the moral order”. There was need to purify society and this was what Alice Auma Lakwena attempted to do.

The rise of Alice Auma Lakwena and her activities was a great political-military threat that the NRA of Museveni had to deal with militarily. First, claiming holy powers to cleanse even the NRA of wrongs, which its leader (Museveni) did not believe they committed, would turn a larger section of the Acholi against the government and its forces. Worse still, the HSMF was not only an army of some 7000 to 10000 soldiers that waged war, but also a new regional cult which spread its indigenized Christian messages as its army advanced. This threatened the NRA/M government because, wherever it passed, in Acholiland and, later, Eastern Uganda, the civilians in the so-called ‘liberated areas’ became morally educated and rehabilitated. As Behrend notes, “During the

⁶⁹⁹ H. Behrend, “War in Northern Uganda”, 249.

march towards Kampala, ritual centers called yards were established where people listened to Lakwena's teachings of love, unity and repentance.⁷⁰⁰ Thus, the Lakwena movement transcended particularistic interests and limitations based on language and ethnicity, as NRM leaders claim.

The Holy Spirit Movement Forces (HSMF) rebellion led by Alice Auma Lakwena was short lived. After a successful battle against NRA forces at Corner Kilak, the HSMF marched to Lira and, in October 1986, reached Tororo and Busoga in eastern Uganda. At the end of October 1986, they lost a decisive battle near Jinja town.⁷⁰¹ In December 1986, Alice Auma crossed to neighbouring Kenya where she was imprisoned because she had no identity card or passport.⁷⁰²

The rise of Alice Lakwena and the HSMF increased the politics of ethnic stereotyping in Acholiland and Uganda. While government officials believed that Lakwena's forces were part of a marauding band of Acholi ex-soldiers accustomed to looting and rape as a way of survival,⁷⁰³ local Acholi believed that it was the government's plan to eliminate the Acholi and Alice Lakwena was simply executing this plan. As one respondent put it, "The Lakwena appeared in Acholi because of the plan drawn by Y. Museveni and his government to kill all the male youth in Acholi as a revenge for what happened many years back".⁷⁰⁴ Rather than debate the accuracy of such an accusation, what matters

⁷⁰⁰ H. Behrend, "War in Northern Uganda", 249.

⁷⁰¹ The defeat of Lakwena and HSMF near Jinja at Magamaga has drawn different views. Some believe Museveni had asked a powerful medicine man from Ghana or Tanzania to defeat Lakwena.

⁷⁰² H. Holger Bernet & Twaddle (Eds.), *From Chaos to Order: The Politics of Constitution Making in Uganda*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1994), 166.

⁷⁰³ This view was expressed by President Museveni himself in his book, Y. K. Museveni, *Sowing the Mustard Seed; The Struggle for Democracy in Uganda*, (London: Macmillan, 1997).

⁷⁰⁴ HURIPEC Report, 58.

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more is that it exposes the extent to which politics in Uganda has been ethnicised. In a situation of internal crisis where the people felt helpless and lacked protection even from Government, such views remained a latent cause for most of them drifting into rebellion.

The fighting in northern Uganda (Acholiland) continued after the defeat of the HSMF and Alice Lakwena. Alice's father Severino Lukoya continued to offer resistance to the NRM. He surrendered in August 1989 because, according to Behrend, his soldiers had left him. The next rebellion under Joseph Kony and his Lords Resistance Army proved remarkably durable and resistant to military defeat. This illustrates the dynamics of conflict in this sub-region.

The dynamics of conflicts in any society often depend on whether the component parts of that society perceive their interests as being in consonance with one another.⁷⁰⁵ In Uganda, the lack of sufficient structural integration of the different parts of the country into one state and the consequent perception of divergent interests that the various constituent parts have been conscious of, have in large measure, informed the dynamics of internal conflicts in the country. Conflicts in the country, Acholiland included, have been a consequence of disturbances of social, political equilibrium and shifts in the locus of power, together with concomitant economic benefits. The rise of Alice Auma Lakwena and the (HSMF) and the LRA and Joseph Kony should be seen within this background. Once conflict began in Acholiland, it kept spreading.

⁷⁰⁵ S. Andreski Stanislaw, *Military Organisation and Society*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd, 1968), Chapter 8.

The LRA and continued conflict in Acholiland

Joseph Kony, leader of the Lords Resistance Army, was a fighter in the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA). When the “Generals” decided to sign a peace accord with the government, Joseph Kony split off from the leadership and, with other fighters who did not accept the peace accord, decided to continue the war against the government.

According to Charles Alai Kony had already left the UPDA by the time of the negotiation of the peace accord. Alai adds that Kony took with him some of the more “illiterate” and “primitive” officers because of fear due to the atrocities they had committed while in the bush.⁷⁰⁶ Like Lakwena, Kony promised to overthrow the government of Yoweri Museveni, purify the Acholi people, and govern along the ten commandments of God. The realities of the LRA conflict, however, appear to be far removed from any of the Lord’s moral claims. Despite years of government attempts to stamp them out, the Lords Resistance Army, often called the Kony rebels by the Ugandan government, proved remarkably resilient. It has been the tragedy of Ugandan politics that violence became a solution of first, rather than last resort, in which every war can be justified since it is always embedded in a history of attack and counter attack, leading to suffering and revenge. The rise of the LRA and Joseph Kony is part of this history.

⁷⁰⁶ In an interview Alai makes this claim. Onyango-Odongo disagrees that the atrocities were by Kony and the few officers who joined him. He emphasizes that the rise of Kony was a result of NRA’s abuse of power.

In 1988 Kony called his movement the Uganda Peoples Democratic Christian Army (UPDCA). Later he changed the name and called it the Uganda Christian Democratic Army (UCDA). In 1991, he again renamed it the Lords Resistance Army (LRA); a name it retains to this day.

According to the government of Uganda, the LRA is a creation of the Sudan government from the remnant of old armies of Idi Amin (1971-1979) and Obote (1980-1985). President Museveni, himself an advocate of such views, even claims that the LRA rebels like those of Alice Lakwena are “culturally backward” people, an expression common in Ugandan conception of the Acholi as violent and war prone.⁷⁰⁷ Museveni holds the view that rebellion in Acholiland is connected to the so-called ‘martial race theory’ or the result of a culturally innate people. The rise of the LRA and the persistent conflict between it and the government of Uganda should be seen in the context of the history of conflicts in Uganda.

Other prominent politicians and scholars, like the current minister of Disaster Preparedness in the NRM government, Tarsis Kabwegyere,⁷⁰⁸ conclude that the rebellion in Acholiland is a peripheral matter, or simply an “Acholi question”. Such views and conclusions propose that the LRA war, like the earlier ones, is an Acholi rebellion; initiated by Acholi and, consequently, for the Acholi themselves to end. This kind of ethnic stigmatization of the Acholi instilled fear in most of them, especially the youth, enough to join the different rebel groups

⁷⁰⁷ Y. K. Museveni, quoted in Amii Omara-Otunnu, “The Struggle for Democracy in Uganda”, in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 30, 3 (1992), 443-463.

⁷⁰⁸ T.B. Kabwegyere, “Civil society and the Democratic Transition in Uganda Since 1986,” in J. Mugaju & J. Oloka-Onyango (Eds.), *No Party Democracy in Uganda: Myths and Realities*, (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2000), 41.

against a government they believed hated all Acholis. As one elder, Ladit

Arweny, put it:

We (Acholi) are commonly spoken of, throughout Uganda as grasshoppers. Now, we Acholi feel that what is being said in other parts of Uganda by other tribes of Uganda is not totally right. Now, in the bush, the composition of rebels is composed by all tribes of Uganda, except that the majority are Acholi, and leadership is again an 'Acholi' leading. You find all tribes even Banyankole; Museveni's tribe, they are also there.⁷⁰⁹

Such stereotypes about the Acholi, in general, do not only provide simple and deceptive explanations of complex issues but are also dangerous breeding grounds for bigotry, fear, resentment, animosity, hatred, and ethnic conflict and cleansing. In extreme cases, stereotypes have culminated in mass violence, ethnic cleansing, pogrom and genocide'.⁷¹⁰

In some circles, the conflict in the Acholi sub-region has been seen as an attempt by the Acholi to secede and form their own state. Brigadier Kasiryegwanga, formerly a fighter under FEDEMU, but later integrated into the National Resistance Army and given charge of the war against the Lords Resistance Army, holds this view. As he put it "the Acholi are generally secessionists with a history of greed for power. They want their own state, they do not want to be part of Uganda but we shall deal with them. They want to belong elsewhere and relate with the terrorists of Sudan".⁷¹¹

⁷⁰⁹ Interview in Gulu town, February- March 05, 2006.

⁷¹⁰ A.B.K Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda*. See also P. Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform you that Tomorrow we Will be killed with our Families*, (New York: Picador, USA, 1995), 195.

⁷¹¹ Interview in Mukono, 2007.

The message delivered by the Army officer quoted above smacks of ethnic stereotype. Whereas it is true that much of Southern Sudan is inhabited by people closely related to the Acholi of northern Uganda,⁷¹² the secession of the north or of the Acholi to form a state of their own has never been an official issue. In their frustrations because of unending conflict, Acholi politicians like Norbert Mao, currently Local Government Chairman in Gulu, and Member of Parliament of Arua, Municipality, Akbar Godi, have often wondered why war has ended elsewhere except in the north. It is in the heat of such moments that they have threatened to mobilize the local people to demand protection from government as a right or else move on to secede and form the Nile State. Such utterances come up in the course of the unending conflict not as source of it.

The conflict in Acholiland should be seen essentially as part of a wider regional war complex with significant links to many other conflicts in Uganda and the neighbouring states like Sudan, and the Congo (DRC). What the people of Acholi have always yearned for is peace and protection from a government they feel has over the years neglected them or left them to the rebels. A parliamentary Group interviewing people in Acholiland encountered the same and reported that: "From the majority of witnesses was an appeal to perceive the insurgency as a national issue rather than an Acholi affair or 'Northern question'".⁷¹³

⁷¹² F. K. Girling, *The Acholi of Uganda*, 1.

⁷¹³ F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surrounding*, 149, See also Parliament of Uganda, Report of the Committee on Defence and International Affairs on the War in Northern Uganda Entebbe, (Government of Uganda : Government Printer, 1995), 53.

Between 1998 and 2003, the government launched the infamous ‘operation North’ and ‘operation Iron Fist’. Both operations involved large scale use of the military with heavy armaments in combing Acholiland of rebels and rebel collaborators. But instead of total peace, these operations flushed the rebels out of their hideouts in the bushes to Acholi doorsteps. The operations proved disastrous in escalating the conflict and exacerbating the humanitarian situation.⁷¹⁴

In addition, government also armed ill-trained Acholi youth to counter LRA attacks. According to Bishop Odama of Gulu Catholic Archdiocese, the “bow and arrow Groups”,⁷¹⁵ as they were known, “were half ‘trained youth, armed with bows and arrows to resist rebels using sophisticated fire power”. Although it appeared like a sign that the local people were supportive of government attempts to end the conflict, it turned out to be the most dangerous strategy because the LRA then turned all its attention on civilians who they accused of allying with the government forces. Bishop Odama emphasizes that “the NRM government came up with this strategy because it regarded the conflict as an Acholi affair”.⁷¹⁶ The Bishop concluded that:

Uganda has 65 tribes. The obligation of good leadership should be to forge this nation together so that no ethnic group feels a sense of less or more belonging to Uganda than the other. The action of NRM leaders has jeopardized the identity of the Acholi who now feel ostracized, rejected and without government.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁴ Frank Van Acker, “The Lords Resistance Army. A New Order No One Ordered”, 337.

⁷¹⁵ These were locally and ill-trained Acholi youth meant to guard villages from LRA attacks. Similar groups were created in the Teso area in the 1980s to guard the area from Karamojong cattle rustlers and LRA rebel infiltration.

⁷¹⁶ Interview with Bishop-Gulu Catholic Archdiocese headquarters, October, 2007.

⁷¹⁷ Interview with Bishop Odama Baptist-Gulu Catholic Archdiocese headquarters, October, 2007.

The duration of the war and its brutality have also called into question the role of government and its top commanders. Local informants and some scholars feel that the conflict is economic. Behrend and Meillassoux, writing on conflict in Rwanda, contend that for most soldiers in conflict areas, war becomes a business and one which is more profitable than peace. They argue that soldiers develop an essential interest in keeping the war going or extending it to other terrain for the purpose of economic gains.⁷¹⁸ In Uganda, politicians from the north and local informants also feel that the conflict in Acholiland is commercial; something that the Uganda People Defence Forces spokesman until 2007, Major Felix Kulagye, dismisses as “simple conspiracy theory”.

Member of Parliament for Aswa-Regan Okumu contends that some top commanders within the army profit directly or indirectly from the conflict. Examples he cites include the theft of all cattle from Acholi in the period 1987-1988, at an estimated value of 24 million dollars, in which the NRA was, at least, passively involved in so far as it failed to prevent it.⁷¹⁹ Other classic examples are more mundane forms of corruption such as padding army pay rolls with ‘ghost’ soldiers, of whom there were more than 10,000 according to an army audit in 1997, or trafficking in army fuel, to which a green colorant has been added to prevent its sale to civilians.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁸ H. Behrend & Meillassoux, C., "Krieg in Ruanda", *Lettre*, 26, 1994 .

⁷¹⁹ Interview with M.P. R. Okumu December, 2007, Kampala.

⁷²⁰ S. Perrot, "Entrepreneurs de l'insecurite: la Face cahcee de l'armee ougandise *Politique Africaine* 75, (Oct. 1999), 55. A court martial was set up in early 2004 at Makindye-Kampala to try senior army officers accused of defrauding the military by creating "ghost soldiers".

Whereas in 1997, President Museveni also criticized Army commanders for the monthly disappearance of Ushs 400 million funds earmarked for financing the government war effort in the north,⁷²¹ he still maintained that the conflict in Acholiland should largely be blamed on the Acholi and the rebel leaders' love for a lavish lifestyle. As he states, "the war in Acholi is about the personal enrichment of rebel leaders, 'parasites of society', fighting for a lifestyle they cannot afford through legal toil".⁷²² Such views became the official government position as the rebels continued to hack to death many innocent Acholi children, women and the elderly.

The conflict in Acholiland kept worsening by the year. Willet Week argues that one of the factors that led to this situation was the internal alienation of the Acholi as well as the Sudanese government support to the LRA. He argues that the internal alienation was aggravated by two inter-related factors. The first was the actions of the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (formerly the NRA) "which has at various times behaved with severity and often brutality in dealing with the civilian population".⁷²³ The second is the support the government provides, through the Acholi districts (i.e. Gulu, Kitgum and Pader), to the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army" which is seen as the motivation for the Sudanese government's support to the LRA".⁷²⁴

The International Crisis Group in its April 2004 report also noted that;

⁷²¹ *New Africa*, October issue, 1997.

⁷²² Museveni's State of Nations Address, in *New Vision* 6, June 2003

⁷²³ F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surroundings*, 38.

⁷²⁴ F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surroundings*, 7.

Sudan has been central to the LRA's survival. When it (LRA) is under serious military pressure, it has been able to retreat safely to Southern Sudanese rear bases to recuperate and rearm. Sudan has also provided medicine and food. Despite the agreement with Uganda, Sudan continues to support the LRA from bases near Torit and Juba, which it claims are refugee camps.⁷²⁵

This implies that without Uganda's indirect routing of armed support to the SPLA, the LRA would never have been able to find safe haven in the Sudan to operate against the NRM in Acholi districts as it did since 1994. This makes the conflict more of an intricate regional issue beyond just local Acholi grievances. It also exposes the extent to which the conflict in Acholiland is an outcome of political developments within Uganda since independence and attempts to portray it as an 'Acholi affair' simply supports our view on ethnicisation of politics by Ugandan leaders.

Out of the above regional dimension of the conflict, the Uganda state and government must accept part of the blame for the lack of proper political judgment that plunged the country and Acholiland in particular into conflict. First, it failed to unite the people of Acholi behind the NRM/A and second it also failed to influence the Acholi/Madi ethnic groups in Southern Sudan not to support the Lords Resistance Army rebels then based in Southern Sudan. Even if many argue that this would be a difficult task since southern Sudanese communities like the Dinka have blood relations with the Acholi, attempts to bring peace by lobbying those communities to support the new NRA government and using Southern Sudanese leaders like General Garang would have possibly

⁷²⁵ For details, see International Crisis Group, *Africa Report*, 77, (14 April 2004), 7.

helped. The weakness of NRA/M leadership was in the indiscriminate branding of all Acholi as rebels.

The argument more often advanced by the NRM government is that it supported the SPLM/A simply as a fulfillment of their Pan-African duty.⁷²⁶ Here, the NRM government failed in leadership because it cannot claim to be Pan Africanist by supporting the SPLM/A in Sudan and yet pursue ethnic division and war at home in Acholiland. The action of the NRM government only strengthens this study's position that the conflict in Acholiland is an outcome of bad politics characteristic of post-independence Uganda. It also justifies the study's earlier position that the conflict in Acholiland has strong causes imbedded in Ugandan politics and history than just being a war by 'criminals'; for criminal purposes like 'looting from the South' without political aim. Thus one can no longer also argue that the conflict in Acholiland is a war of the 'remnants' of the earlier Obote and Amin armies of the past, but an army of children (many of them under age) that have been forced into it, not by the 'remnants' but Kony-a product of both the internal rebellions against NRA in Acholi and Alice Lakwena. The NRM government has, over time, stereotyped rebels and the general population in Acholiland and branded them as rebels or terrorists, but this name-calling does not help in resolving the conflict. They have also dismissed Kony and the LRA as a group of criminals guided by so-called spiritual powers.⁷²⁷

⁷²⁶ *Human Rights Watch: Stolen children: Abduction and Recruitment in Northern Uganda*, Available online: <http://hrw.org/reports/2003/uganda0303/>

⁷²⁷ *The Monitor* November 22, 1999. See also Gulu Chairman, Norbert Mao. Quoted in *HURIPEC Report*, 134-135.

The history of Africa is rich in political movements guided by and mobilized through a recall to a people's religious past; for example the Maji-Maji rebellion in Tanganyika, 1905-1907 and the Chimurenga wars of 1896-97 in modern Zimbabwe. Therefore, it is possible that the LRA and Kony only resorted to metaphysical means to express their political demands. In 1994 Betty Bigombe, then minister for the Pacification of Northern Uganda, made attempts at ending the war through peace negotiation with the LRA and its leadership. After she had spent three months in the jungles in Acholiland, the LRA still refused to lay down arms citing fear of revenge and lack of trust of Yoweri Museveni.⁷²⁸ Due to Betty Bigombe and Ateker Ejalu's⁷²⁹ efforts, many rebels were persuaded to leave the bush. Betty Bigombe has argued elsewhere that, even though Kony resorted to the use of religion and claims of spirit possession, he nevertheless, speaks sense about his intentions. She is quoted as saying:

Of course, Kony speaks sense. I remember one night while I was in the bush talking peace with the leader, I went with him one mile away from the crowd and he spoke perfect sense. The use of spiritual powers does not stop him from speaking sense.⁷³⁰

The conflict in Acholiland should be seen as part of Uganda's post-colonial politics and not just as an act of the Acholi as a 'martial race' or 'violent people by nature'. The German military philosopher, Clausewitz defined war as "the extension of politics by other means".⁷³¹ This implies that both sides to the

⁷²⁸ *The Monitor* November, 22 1999

⁷²⁹ Ateker Ejalu was a politician from Teso and Minister in Museveni's first cabinet till 1998 and was involved in peace negotiations with the Uganda People's Army of Peter Otai then operating in the Teso Region till 1987. He was co-opted to assist negotiate with LRA rebels during the first Betty Bigombe attempt in 1994.

⁷³⁰ *Sunday Vision*, August 31, 2003.

⁷³¹ F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surroundings*, 56.

conflict in Acholiland are extending politics to the people but in different styles and with serious negative consequences.

It is also impossible for a people to wage a protracted war for over 20 years for only “criminal” purposes without a political aim. The NRM government and leadership evaded their responsibility for a long time by accusing some Acholi political leaders of giving support to the LRA instead of using other means to end the conflict. It is also understood that many of these leaders that President Museveni perpetually accuses of supporting Kony include Members of Parliament and former Presidential candidates-Kiiza Besigye and Paul Semwogerere, and their respective political organizations. However, one wonders whether all these opposition politicians are criminal yet they served the NRM government in different capacities before they fell out with the current establishment due to internal disagreements. It can be concluded that Museveni takes such an illogical position partly because he regards the conflict as an “Acholi affair”, orchestrated by former defeated soldiers.

To attain meaningful peace, both sides in the conflict need to know that they have committed previous criminal acts against the people of Acholi, and it is time they see peace as a necessity. Most informants believe that President Museveni does not want peaceful negotiations to end the conflict because of his hatred for the Acholi. As a focus group in Minakulu concluded; “So long as

Museveni is in power, the UPDF (Formerly NRA) will continue killing the people of Acholi”.⁷³²

Other informants still have a vivid memory of their loss of property and especially cattle in the early days of the war and believe the loss was a ‘master plan’. As they stated “we had animals (cattle) and all our animals have been taken by Karamojong and the NRA. It was by raiding, looting and the use of force and sometimes killings.”⁷³³ All this summarizes the result of bad governance and politics. The NRM government never took steps to allay the fears of the people or to change its image through vital political and economic development of Acholiland. They instead fell prey to ethnic politics characteristic of post-independence Uganda.

The repeated calls by the Acholi that peace can only return to their area if Museveni leaves power also indicates the level of distrust because of failure by the government to protect the Acholi. Most Acholi civilians remain in a state of despondency and frustration. As one respondent put it in 2006:

We have nowhere to turn to now. The conflict is now coming to 20 years and this camp is the only place we shall be killed in. Our cries should be sent to the whole world. Talking will not solve anything now except leadership change. There is no need of over staying in power.⁷³⁴

Understandably in their frustration, the people of Acholi have voted against the NRM and president Museveni since 1996. This largely expresses their feeling about the lack of peace since NRM came to power. This may not be the best

⁷³² Interview with Focus Group 5, Minakulu- Gulu, 15 Nov. 2007.

⁷³³ Interview with Focus Group 5, Minakulu- Gulu, 15 Nov. 2007.

⁷³⁴ Interview at Pajule, 5 February, 2006.

way to express their frustrations but the fact that all they have known since 1986 is war explains their action. The NRM government has not helped to reverse the situation either.

Other respondents in a focus group interview at Paibona are of the view that the conflict in Acholiland is a political war fought to ensure that the political and economic leadership of Uganda should be taken away from the Nilotic people in the north and vested permanently in Bantu people in the south of Uganda. According to them, this plan was hatched in 1986 by Museveni and the NRA. They cited the way political posts were distributed in 1986, with only one Acholi, Betty Akech, as cabinet minister. In the NRA, all the top Generals are Banyankole from Museveni's region.⁷³⁵ They contend that it is the intention of the new rulers of Uganda to eliminate the Acholi military capacity forever so as to achieve their plans of 1981.

At the center of the above argument still lies ethnicity and fear as factors leading to the conflict. Even if one may argue that the fears expressed by members of the above focus group remain hearsay, the attitude of the NRM leadership in Acholiland did not help the situation. They entered Acholiland as conquerors, not liberators and made no attempts to reconcile with the local people. Indeed, what transpired fits well in E.A Brett's view that "Victorious regimes are tempted to assert their authority by punishing and humiliating the vanquished. Yet, coercion is an uncertain basis for political authority, since violence creates potential enemies who will comply only while they believe that

⁷³⁵ Interviews at Paibona- October 13, 2007.

resistance is impossible”.⁷³⁶ The failure by the Museveni’s regime to integrate the north largely laid basis for continued conflict.

The conflict in Acholiland can also be explained by analysis of situational factors within Acholiland itself. At the time of the NRM/A takeover in 1986, and in a situation of extreme upheaval, there was a leadership crisis and a deep-rooted generation gap within Acholi. As Frank Van Acker has rightly noted, “Acholi political and military leaders then showed themselves to be incapable of protecting Acholi interests, and demonstrated little imagination in dealing with the crisis”.⁷³⁷ As Behrend also adds:

traditional leaders were unable to appease and exorcise *cen* (bad spirits) and exterminate the witchcraft that plagued the land on the return of the former Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) soldiers after Okello’s fall. In this vacuum, Alice Lakwena of the HSMF and Joseph Kony of the LRA, both in their twenties, emerged as leaders to offer what they considered a holistic solution; based on Acholi culture to reinvent traditions of healing and cleansing. These new ‘leaders,’ did not only establish a new social hierarchy in Acholiland but also successfully mobilized the population during the late 1980s and 1990s.⁷³⁸

In addition, the combination of a number of other elements directly supported the operational capacity of insurgents in the Acholi sub-region; such as the proximity of Sudan; a huge country with its own share of rebellion and tenuous or non-existent government control of the southern area bordering on Uganda.

⁷³⁶ E. A. Brett, “Neutralising the Use of Force in Uganda”, 145.

⁷³⁷ F. Van Acker, “The Lords Resistance Army: A New Order No One Ordered”, 344.

⁷³⁸ H. Behrend, Quoted in *HURIPEC-Uganda, Report*, 47. See also F. Van Acker, “The Lords Resistance Army. A New Order No One Ordered”, 345.

This area offered easy access to arms even before the advent of direct support to the LRA by the Sudanese government.⁷³⁹

The issue of arms proliferation is closely related to the quick succession of wars in Uganda and neighbouring countries, especially Sudan and Congo (DRC). Sudan became the most important source of such arms and support to rebels in Northern Uganda partly because of its border divided Acholi; people; fall in southern Sudan. As Professor Collins has repeatedly pointed out, “boundary adjustments in the early part of the 20th century failed to take into account ethnic realities. By splitting groups such as Acholi, Madi and the Kakwa, the European colonial powers unwittingly created a situation whereby conflict became part of the political landscape along the Sudanese-Uganda border.⁷⁴⁰ The result is that in 2004, an AK 47 gun sold for as little as Ushs 25,000 (approx. \$12) in the Sudanese border town of Kajo-Keji.⁷⁴¹

Moreover, the rebellion could tap into the economic and political resources of a large Diaspora of Acholi with a history of strained relations with the Museveni government. To gain an idea of the potential offered, the best place to look is in the area of capital flight. Estimates by Collier and others indicate that by 1986, some 60 percent of private wealth in Uganda was held abroad. By 1997, the

⁷³⁹ H. Behrend, (1999) Quoted in *HURIPPEC-UGANDA*, Report, 47. See also F. Van Acker, “The Lords Resistance Army. A New Order No One Ordered”, 345. See also Ofcansky, I, 2000, “Warfare and Instability along the Sudan-Uganda Border”, 202-204.

⁷⁴⁰ For a recent assessment of the Acholi and Madi communities, see Tim Allen, “Ethnicity and Tribalism on the Sudan-Uganda border”, in Katsuyoshi Fukui and J. Markakis (Eds.), *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, (London: Currey, 1994), 112-139. Another useful study is Adefuye, “The Kakwa of Uganda and the Sudan: The Ethnic Factor in National and International Politics”, In A. I Asiwaju, *Partitioned Africa: Ethnic Relations Across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884-1984*, (London: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 51-69.

⁷⁴¹ Larjour Consultancy, South Sudan; Case Study covering a number of countries in Central Africa and Western Equatorial”, Jei, December 2002, Paper presented at a Pax Christi Conference on the Proliferation of Small Arms in the DRC, Sudan and Uganda, Arua, February, 2003.

Uganda government had turned the tide on capital flight, but an estimated 50 percent of private wealth remained abroad.⁷⁴² Support from the Acholi in the diaspora still illustrates that events in Acholiland had attained an international dimension through ethnic linkages in politics.

Finally, there was the huge stock of former Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) soldiers which was important as a catalyst of rebellion because it formed a fertile recruitment ground for rebel movements and created social turmoil.⁷⁴³ Former UNLA soldiers had less to lose by joining rebel movements. As Behrend stated:

for most of the soldiers, whether they fight on the side of the government or its opponents, the war has become a business and one which is more profitable than peace. They have thus developed an essential interest in keeping the fighting going or extending it to other terrain, for example Rwanda.⁷⁴⁴

As the conflict in Acholiland ran its course to 20 years, it became a system of production and created a form of life which “normalizes and banalizes violence and brutality; and blurs the distinction between war and peace”.⁷⁴⁵

For as long as the conflict in Acholi persisted, most government officials explained it as the result of the fact that the local people supported the Lords Resistance Army. There are reports that “some villagers especially in Kitgum and Pader do follow the bandits into their hideouts and donate goats and fowl.

⁷⁴² P. Collier, A. Hoeffler & C. Patillo, *Flight Capital as Portfolio Choice, Development*. Research Working Paper 2006, (World Bank: Washington D. C., 1999).

⁷⁴³ The situation was exacerbated by the corruption within the Uganda army where army commanders created “ghost soldiers”, and inflated army pay rolls to make extra money. In 2005, the Defence Ministry under the President set up a committee to investigate this issue.

⁷⁴⁴ H Behrend and Meillassoux, “Krieg in Ruanda”, 26.

⁷⁴⁵ F. Van Acker, “The Lords Resistance Army: A New Order No One Ordered”, 345.

Some even chat up the commanders and share meals.⁷⁴⁶ Government representatives⁷⁴⁷ in the north are wont to claim that there is an active level of support for collaboration with the LRA. The Minister of Security until 2005, Betty Akech, who also hails from Acholiland, re-emphasized the above position of local Acholi support to the rebel groups. As she observed,

There are people who are benefiting from the war; the shopkeepers, the drug dealers and so on. We know also that there are children giving up rebellion and coming back home, but there are instances where their families send them back. There was a girl who came back with Ug. Shillings 3 million (about \$ 2500) and said she was tired of the war. But her mother asked her how she could come back when she could get so much money from the bush.⁷⁴⁸

This not to say that the LRA war is an Acholi affair, grounded in Acholi history or that the LRA is acting as the agent of, at least, part of the Acholi constituency. Besides the fact that substantial operational collaboration of the Acholi with the LRA is not proven, atrocities that this body has committed since 1986 left destroyed homesteads, abducted children, women and helpless old people in Acholiland. It is inconceivable that an organization that exists because of local support would commit grievous atrocities on the same constituency that supports it. Such a position, therefore, supports the contention that the conflict in Acholiland has been used to stereotype the Acholi community in general.

⁷⁴⁶ Onapito Ekamoloit, *New Vision*, 4, October 2002.

⁷⁴⁷ Such views have been expressed by Resident District Commissioner-Gulu, Rtd. Colonel Walter Ochora, in an interview on 5 May, 2005\7. President Museveni has also held such strong views about local Acholi collaboration with the LRA.

⁷⁴⁸ John Etum, "Acholi Support Kony-Akech" *New Vision*, 9 May. 2003.

It might even be correct to argue that, as the conflict persisted, the Acholi lost trust in the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces because of its failure to protect them just as they did in the LRA for their brutality.

In conclusion, any complete and correct analysis of the causes of the conflict in Acholiland must go beyond simply looking at Acholi social institutions and the psycho-sociological behaviour of the Acholi, and to recognize the politics of the situation at the national and regional levels. The conflict in Acholiland should be seen as part and parcel of Uganda's post-colonial history and politics characterized by violence and counter-violence. With the militarization of politics and ethnic purges that had already begun under Obote in the 1960s, the state; which according to philosopher-Thomas Hobbes ought to limit violence has increasingly itself become an instrument of violent retaliation. Whoever took over state power, (the NRM and Museveni included) was not only able to gain wealth, but also to take revenge against members of other ethnic or religious groups (as in times before the existence of the state). Such a situation only provokes resistance and militant counter reactions. The conflict in Acholiland (1986-2006) must be seen in this context.

**CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT IN POST-INDEPENDENT
ACHOLILAND, 1986- 2006.**

People in Acholiland are tired of war; they want peace and development. Internally Displaced People (IDPs) need more help to build schools, medical centers, water points, farm implements and needs (UN-Special Envoy for Lords Resistance Army (LRA) affected areas-JOACHIM CHISSANO).⁷⁴⁹

Introduction

This chapter seeks to examine the costs and general consequences of the twenty-year-old conflict in Acholiland between 1986 and 2006.

Acholiland in northern Uganda has suffered from persistent conflict and insecurity since 1986. For twenty (20) years – (1986-2006) the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) under Joseph Kony and its predecessors like the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army under Odong Latek, the Holy Spirit Movement forces of Alice Auma Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement of Severino Lukoya waged a civil war against the government of Uganda and terrorized the civilian population of Gulu, Pader and Kitgum. Neighbouring districts of Arua, Lira, Adjumani, Moyo, Yumbe in West Nile and Teso sub-region in eastern Uganda have also been affected. Indirectly but significantly, the conflict in Acholiland has drained the country's economy and disrupted the National Resistance Movement government record as the longest serving regime when most parts of Uganda has at least enjoyed relative peace and economic development.

⁷⁴⁹ Joachim Chissano- Quoted in *Daily Monitor* 20 May, 2008.

The Genesis of Conflict in Acholiland: A Recap

Conflict in Acholiland began as early as May 1986 when former Uganda National Liberation Army soldiers who had been defeated by the National Resistance Army of Museveni in Kampala regrouped in Southern Sudan and decided to take up arms against the NRA.⁷⁵⁰ Under the command of Brigadier Odong Latek and his newly formed Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA), ex-UNLA soldiers, who formed the bulk of the UPDA, attacked the NRA in Acholiland on August 20, 1986. Beyond this, the UPDA did not have much impact in the area. As Acker Frank⁷⁵¹ notes, the UPDA and UPDM did not enjoy widespread support from the Acholi people. It was based in refugee camps in Southern Sudan without clear co-ordination with its political wing- the UPDM based in London and could not easily claim to represent the Acholi political voice. Once it did re-enter Uganda, the overall commander Odong Latek had difficulties in co-ordinating and controlling his troops which operated in quasi-independent units.⁷⁵²

In June 1987, President Museveni offered an amnesty to anyone who voluntarily left the bush and surrendered to the National Resistance Army (NRA). In December 1987 alone, 1300 to 1800 rebels of the UPDA surrendered⁷⁵³. This led to a split in the ranks of the UPDA between two of its leaders, namely, Angelo Okello who wanted peaceful resolution of the conflict and Odong Latek who remained defiant and wanted to continue fighting. In May 1988, more than

⁷⁵⁰ Ogenga-Otunnu, "Causes and Consequences of the War in Acholiland", 4.

⁷⁵¹ F. Van Acker, "The Lords Resistance Army: A New Order No One Ordered", 20.

⁷⁵² F. Van Acker, "The Lords Resistance Army: A New Order No One Ordered", 20.

⁷⁵³ H. Behrend, Alice *Lakwena and the Holy Spirit War in Northern Uganda, 1985-1997*, 172.

10,000 rebels surrendered in Gulu and Kitgum, paving way for a peace agreement with the UPDA on 3 June 1988.⁷⁵⁴

The brief period of insurgency by the UPDA in Gulu and Kitgum had some consequences. As a result of the activities of UPDA, the NRM government declared the Gulu and Kitgum Districts war zones. Acholiland in particular and northern Uganda in general was then isolated from the rest of the country, hence widening the north-south divide. Roadblocks erected in most of Gulu and Kitgum regulated transport access and trade collapsed almost completely around the end of 1987.⁷⁵⁵

As early as March 1987, the NRA forced large segments of the population in Gulu District to leave their farms and homes and take 'refuge' in camps or in Gulu town. This led to the first wave of Acholi 'Internal refugees, fleeing', not from rebels, but from the NRA. The NRA is also accused of 'looting livestock, burning houses, supplies and agriculture fields.'⁷⁵⁶ These camps were not secure as the rebels frequently attacked them thereby adding to the frustrations of the displaced people.

This marked the beginning of the exodus of refugees from Acholi villages to towns; a feature that came to be referred to as 'Night Commuter' in 2002 at the height of the conflict. By December 1987, some 33,000 Acholi refugees were living in various camps distributed throughout Gulu town. At the beginning of

⁷⁵⁴ C. Lamwaka, "The Peace Process in Northern Uganda, 1986- 1990", 13.

⁷⁵⁵ H. Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirit War in Northern Uganda*, 1985-1997, 172.

⁷⁵⁶ Interview with Simon Oyet (MP) September 2007.

1988, the number of refugees had grown to 171,200. There was not enough to eat, sanitary conditions were inadequate, and, except in Lacor hospital, medical care had more or less collapsed⁷⁵⁷. Religious leaders from northern Uganda condemned the government's decision to create these IDPS and called on the NRM government to facilitate the people to go home; but to no avail. In the words of Archbishop of Gulu Archdiocese, Baptist Odama:

The people have been living in camps for more than five years now and their living condition is horrible. The camps are overcrowded and there is no privacy for parents. Besides, rebels come and attack the people in the camps where there are many NRA army and the army do nothing about it. Children in the camps are malnourished and about 4 die per day. Girls as young as 13 years have resorted to prostitution as a way of earning money.⁷⁵⁸

The policy that the government came up with of creating these so-called protected camps also had negative consequences with regard to land use and rights in Acholiland. Travelling through the Acholi region, one is indeed struck by its "emptiness". The Gulu District Development Plan 2001/2002 established that a total of 10,301 square kms of arable land makes up 87.4 percent of the districts land area. Yet less than 10 percent is cultivated each year.⁷⁵⁹ This anomaly largely affected food production and partly accounts for the famine that this area, once considered Uganda's food basket, suffered. Besides, there is also the fear among the Acholi in IDPS on how land rights under a system of communal tenure can survive and be protected against encroachment by

⁷⁵⁷ C. Lamwaka, "The Peace Process in Northern Uganda", 2.

⁷⁵⁸ *Leadership Magazine*, Catholic Church, *Leadership Magazine*, 398, (Uganda: Catholic Church, Oct.2001).

⁷⁵⁹ For details on this see the 2001/2002 Gulu district Development Plan. This is a summary of what each District intends to do in the path of Development and is presented to the District Council and Ministry of Finance for approval and funding respectively. This Document is available at Gulu District Planning Office.

outsiders in the face of depopulation and a seemingly empty land.⁷⁶⁰ Many Acholi in IDPs fear that government may take control of mineralized land areas in Amuru and other parts of Acholi where people are still living in IDPs. This mistrust may fuel more conflicts in the region.

In terms of labour, the same policy of regrouping people in camps contributed to turning the northern districts into a labour reserve for sugarcane plantations in the south. The London based Acholi Association, which organized the Kacoke-Madit (or big meeting) of 1998, observed that the ‘policy’ of protected villages is converting self-sufficient farmers into destitutes and dependents.⁷⁶¹ The LRA responded to this policy by attacking the camps, destroying the fabric of society and a generation of Acholi children by abducting them and turning them into traumatized killers.

As in many subsistence economies in Africa, capital in Uganda is accumulated in the form of cattle. Cattle were a source of power and prestige, a store of wealth from which to finance educational expenses for growing children and to pay family medical expenses, and to meet dowry payment and payments for rituals such as cleansing and atonement that are common in Acholi culture.⁷⁶²

⁷⁶⁰ L. Larubi, “Highlights of Conflict and Means of Livelihood Research”, in COPE Working Paper 32 (ACCORD), Kampala, April 2000, 21.

⁷⁶¹ C. Lanker P’Okot, “The Causes and Effects of the Northern War in Uganda and the Quest for a just and speedy Permanent Resolution”, Kacoke Madit meeting, (4-6 April 1997).

⁷⁶² J. Dorsey & S. Opeitum, “The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in the Acholiland Sub-region of Uganda”, Commissioned by Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda, (Kampala, (CSOPNU), September 2002, Unpublished).

The near total de-stocking of Gulu and Kitgum districts is frequently cited by many respondents as one of the notable tragedies of the war. Westbrook asserts that the cattle population in Kitgum fell from 156,667 in 1986 to 3,239 in 1998, while, in the same period, the national cattle population increased from 3-5.6 million.⁷⁶³ Apart from having serious economic consequences, this has destabilized the social fabric, as cattle rearing has been the traditional contribution of Acholi men to household welfare. Consequently, the household economic burden now falls on women's shoulders while the men have resorted to heavy drinking.⁷⁶⁴

The loss of cattle also contributed to the deepening suspicion of NRA activities in Acholiland; and, hence, the Acholi's indirect support to rebel activities in the areas. Even when the government argued that cattle rustling was carried out by Acholi neighbours, the Karamojong, local informants argued, to the contrary, that the NRA was responsible. As Behrend highlighted, the confusion regarding the identity of the cattle thieves remains an issue among the Acholi in as far as there is an often repeated accusation that NRA soldiers often disguised themselves as Karamojong cattle raiders.⁷⁶⁵ This perception among the Acholi may make them take years to reconcile with the NRA/NRM government.

⁷⁶³ D. Westbrook, "The Torment of Northern Uganda: A legacy of Missed Opportunities", in the *Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution*, 3-2 (June 2000), 5.

⁷⁶⁴ ISIS-WICCE - Women International Cross-cultural Exchange, Women's Experience of Armed Conflict in Uganda, Gulu District 1986-1999 (Kampala, July 2001, Unpublished), 38. See also Chris Dolan, "What do you Remember?", A Rough guide to the war in Northern Uganda, 1986-2000, COPE fieldwork findings, COPE working paper 33 (ACCORD, London, April 2000), 10.

⁷⁶⁵ ISIS-WICCE, "Women's Experience of Armed Conflict in Uganda, Gulu District", 10.

Besides, the NRA's brutal methods of waging war also drove a number of people to seek protection under different resistance movements that sprung after the defeat and collapse of the UPDA. It was this that partly boosted the rank and file of the Holy Spirit Movement Forces of Alice Lakwena; and Lords Resistance Army (LRA) of Joseph Kony after 1987.

The rise and brief resistance of Alice Auma Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement against the NRM regime is part of the history of conflict in post-colonial Uganda. Unlike its predecessor, the UPDA, the Holy Spirit Movement Forces (HSMF) of Alice Auma Lakwena never thought of direct armed struggle with the NRA/NRM from a purely military perspective.⁷⁶⁶ Alice Auma and the Holy Spirit Movement forces' main concern was to deal with the consequences of the Luwero war (1981-85) and the war that had started in Acholiland by cleansing the Acholi Society of witchcraft and sorcery which she believed was the main source of evil in that society.⁷⁶⁷ She also wanted to cleanse UNLA ex-soldiers because of the atrocities they were accused of in the Luwero war and the NRA and soldiers accused of looting, raping and disrespecting Acholi culture. Her movement attracted the political and military elite from outside Acholiland. This gave it a broader national outlook than UPDA.

The Holy Spirit Movement operated easily in Acholi, Lango, Teso and some parts of Tororo before it was defeated in Busoga, 100 kms from the capital, Kampala. The consequences of Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement war against

⁷⁶⁶ S.S. Kayunga, "The Impact of Armed opposition on the Movement System in Uganda", 113.

⁷⁶⁷ S.S. Kayunga, "The Impact of Armed opposition on the Movement System in Uganda", 113.

the National Resistance Army were not as significant as that of the LRA-NRA conflict. However, activities of the HSMF in Teso brought rivalry between the Iteso and the Acholi with the Iteso accusing the Acholi of destroying their crops, looting cattle and causing insecurity as the Lakwena troops passed through their land.⁷⁶⁸ In other parts like Tororo, elders interviewed believe that the Holy Spirit Movement Forces largely attracted thieves and the youths who believed that if she stormed Kampala City, they would loot shops and other valuables. Most of them were, however, either killed or taken prisoners of war after the defeat of Lakwena.⁷⁶⁹

With the defeat of Alice Auma and the Holy Spirit Movement Forces, her father Severino Lukoya, took over the leadership of the rebellion. He was arrested and briefly detained in Gulu before he was released under the Amnesty Act. This gave way to the rise of Joseph Kony and his Lord Resistance Army. The Lords Resistance Army under Joseph Kony has proved to be the most enduring and most difficult to defeat.

The Lords Resistance Army and Conflict in Acholiland

Joseph Kony was a soldier in the Uganda Peoples Democratic Army (UPDA). He is said to have joined the rebellion against the NRA because of the NRA's abuse of power. When the UNLA Generals in the UPDA decided to sign the Peace Agreement of 1988 with the National Resistance Army/Movement, Joseph Kony split off from the leadership and launched war against the NRA/M government

⁷⁶⁸ Interview with Minister-Musa Ecweru-2007

⁷⁶⁹ Interview with Ex-chiefs Y. Tanga Obbo, Obadia-Ochwo, and Alfred Othieno – Ex-Agriculture officer- 4 March, 2007.

with those fighters who did not accept the peace agreement.⁷⁷⁰ It is the LRA, more than its predecessors, that has been the most difficult to defeat despite President Museveni's blustery rhetoric of the might of Uganda's national Army (UPDF). Most of the consequences of the 20 year old conflict are directly related to the combative activities between the LRA and the NRM government under Yoweri Museveni.

When Museveni captured power in 1986, a new wave of insurgency erupted in the northern part of Uganda generally, but was most persistent in Acholiland. The 20 year old war (1986-2006) in Acholiland has led to abandoned homesteads and fallow farmlands that once provided most of the country's cassava, millet and beans.⁷⁷¹ Social infrastructure like roads, schools and health centers have been destroyed, while economic growth has been greatly undermined and human development retarded. For instance, a health professional from Kitgum reported that, at the height of the war (2002-2005), the health centre in Amuru was completely destroyed. In the same period, schools were abandoned, while most of them were either occupied by soldiers or by displaced people.⁷⁷²

As a general rule, destruction of physical assets has not been a major focus of the LRA. Their major interest has been in looting goods they can carry easily, particularly drugs from health centers and food from Internally Displaced

⁷⁷⁰ Uganda: *Abducted and Abused: Renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda*, July 2003.

⁷⁷¹ *Sunday Life Magazine*, 15, May 2005: 8.

⁷⁷² "The Net Economic Cost of the conflict in Acholiland Sub-region of Northern Uganda", 7.

People's (IDPs) fields, homes and shops.⁷⁷³ However, even then, many buildings left for years without periodic maintenance during the insurgency became unsuitable for occupancy. Their loss as useful assets, therefore, becomes costs of the conflict on the government of Uganda as the well as Acholi people.

Moreover, displaced people have lived in filthy camps; children have either been abducted or forced to commute from villages to nearby towns (the so-called night commuters) and school going children lost opportunities for education.

Malnutrition has been common among children despite efforts by the government and World Food Programme (WFP) and other Non-government organizations to supply essential requirements and food rations.⁷⁷⁴ The supply of relief supplies to IDPs or any humanitarian activity was always influenced and regulated by government agents. The government argued that relief programmes are a response to a state of emergency; which according to them, was not the case with Acholiland.⁷⁷⁵

Therefore, while there is relative peace and prosperity in most of southern Uganda, there has been correspondingly increased misery and abject poverty in the north, estimated at 70 percent above the country's average of 40% in northern Uganda.⁷⁷⁶ Children and women who constitute 80% percent of the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) have been the direct targets of attack, abductions and sexual exploitation and violence. UNICEF's Humanitarian Situation Report also indicates that the HIV prevalence rate was high for

⁷⁷³ Interview with Omara Atubo, 7 May, 2007.

⁷⁷⁴ "The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in the Acholiland Sub-region of Uganda", 7.

⁷⁷⁵ F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surroundings*, 187.

⁷⁷⁶ "The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in Acholiland Sub-region of Uganda", 7-8.

women at 9 percent to 7 percent for men in the conflict affected districts of Lira, Apac, Gulu, Kitgum and Pader. The National average stands at 6.7 percent UNICEF, in conjunction with its partners, provided voluntary counseling, testing, and prevention of child-to-mother transmission services to approximately 13,300 people in northern Uganda in 2006.⁷⁷⁷ The 2007 UNICEF Report, however, emphasizes that despite the ongoing expansion of humanitarian assistance and programmes, the region still faces the challenges of providing essential health services, clean water, nutrition, quality education and decent shelter.

After 20 years of civil war, more than 1.5 million Acholi inhabitants have either fled to Internally Displaced Peoples Camps; preferring to risk slow death by disease and malnutrition,⁷⁷⁸ or migrated to other parts of Uganda. Areas like Masindi have benefited from a large influx of people from Acholiland who tend to have above average qualifications and levels of education, especially teachers and nurses. About 40,000 Acholi are reported to have moved to Masindi district by mid 2003. A few hundred also moved to West Nile, crossing the Nile river.⁷⁷⁹ Gulu town alone that was home to some 40,000 people before the war harboured, around 140,000 by 2003.. In addition, in periods of intense rebel activity, St. Mary's Missionary Hospital in Lacor, located a few kilometers outside Gulu town, accommodated more than 40,000 people between July 2002

⁷⁷⁷ UNICEF Report 2007, on War & Health Related Issues (UNICEF Uganda Country Office, Unpublished).

⁷⁷⁸ *Sunday Magazine* 2005.

⁷⁷⁹ F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surrounding*, 193.

and August 2003.⁷⁸⁰ Many people also migrated to Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. This represents a net loss to Uganda.

Apart from the lack of supply of essential goods to the Internally Displaced Camps, the frequent attacks on some of the camps (e.g. Pabo and Mucwin camps) by rebels of the LRA added to the frustrations of the displaced people. The government responded to rebel attacks on villages in Acholiland and to general insecurity in the region by resettling many people in the so-called protected villages; more accurately described as displacement camps. By 2003, around 800,000 persons or 70 percent of the Acholiland population had been internally displaced.⁷⁸¹ Gulu district alone housed thirty five camps in 2001, while Kitgum and Pader together had eight such villages.⁷⁸² In mid 2003, the World Food Programme (WFP) distributed relief in thirty-three camps in Gulu, seven in Kitgum and twenty in Pader.⁷⁸³ The largest camps, notably Pabo, Amuru and Anaka, all in Gulu district, housed between 34,000 and 47,000 people in 2000.⁷⁸⁴

Political observers have argued that the above situation has made Museveni's regime hated by the Acholi. Subsequently, his regime has created "two Ugandas" where being born in Acholi is a curse. As Alice Alaso notes, "For the twenty years of his (Museveni's) rule, any child born in northern Uganda (Acholiland in particular), is literally condemned to poverty, no education, life in

⁷⁸⁰ F. Sverker, *Living With Bad Surroundings*, 193.

⁷⁸¹ Human Rights Watch, *Abducted and Abused*, 6.

⁷⁸² *Acholi Religious leaders Plan (ARLP), Magazine*, 2001, 27.

⁷⁸³ Human Rights Watch, *Abducted and Abused*, 66.

⁷⁸⁴ See *Acholi Religious Leaders Plan Magazine*, 27.

camps and ill-health.⁷⁸⁵ This situation has created terrible hatred and feeling of revenge by the Acholi against the people of the south, and in particular, the Banyakole tribe of Museveni.⁷⁸⁶ As one Acholi elder from the north put it,

Leadership may trivialize the problems of northern Uganda but some day, the 'night commuters', school dropouts and unemployed youth will descend upon the educated rich and the well-to-do (in the south and especially Banyankole) as thieves, prostitutes, street children, then the whole nation will realize that it was wrong to have ignored the crisis in the North.⁷⁸⁷

These views confirm that the divided nation may not be about to heal from the effects of internal conflicts. There is bitterness in northern and eastern Uganda where it is perceived that the "prosperous" Uganda stops at Karuma Bridge, namely, the bridge on River Nile that divides the geographical North from the South.

Indeed, one notices a contrast in the level of development as one drives across the bridge northwards. Scholars hailing from the north like Ginyera-Pincywa and Obong have argued that the "moods of the people of northern Uganda are moods of marginalization, frustration and desperation."⁷⁸⁸ Indeed, the people in this sub-region have been left behind economically and this is partly why they have also shunned Museveni and his NRM government.

⁷⁸⁵ A. Alaso, "We Need Equal Resource Distribution", *The Daily Monitor*, July 19, 2006, 23.

⁷⁸⁶ The 'two' Ugandas here is always used refer to the socio-economic differences and general condition pertaining to the North and South, where the North (largely Acholiland) has not enjoyed the degree of peace and economic development the south has in the period of Museveni as President (1986-2006).

⁷⁸⁷ R. Okumu, quoted by S. Makara, "Uganda's 2006 Multiparty Elections", 59.

⁷⁸⁸ A. Ginyera-Pincywa and Q. Obong, "The Moods of Northern Uganda", in Sabiti Makara and G. Tukahebwa (Eds.), *Voting for Democracy in Uganda*, (2003), 54-80.

From 1994, conflict in Acholiland between the Lords Resistance Army rebels and the NRM government ceased being a purely local rebellion against the Uganda government fought within Ugandan borders. It became a proxy war between the government of Uganda and that of Sudan where each supported rebels opposed to either government. The conflict therefore had international-consequences on the diplomatic relations between Kampala and Khartoum.

Sudan's support for the LRA started in 1994 and this support was critical in turning LRA into a deadly organization. Sudan then argued that its support for the LRA was in retaliation for Uganda's support for the Southern Sudan Peoples Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). As president Omar Bashir of Sudan once stated:

On the previous relationship, we used to support the LRA. We used to provide them with logistics, ammunition and everything. That was a response to the support Uganda used to give to SPLA. But now the situation is different because both parties are committed to peace.⁷⁸⁹

In spite of the fact the government of Uganda claimed it did this partly because the SPLA was a "black man's struggle for emancipation in Sudan"⁷⁹⁰, its action negatively affected the relations between Kampala and the government in Khartoum. Both the LRA and the UPDF then intensified their military actions to the detriment of peace and stability in Acholiland. Despite the promise made by President Bashir to stop supporting the LRA rebels, Sudan clandestinely

⁷⁸⁹ A. Bainomugisha and G. Tumushabe, *Torturous Peace Process in Northern Uganda: An Analysis of Peace Initiatives and Prospects for a Settlement*, (Kampala: Makerere University Printery, 2005), 12.

⁷⁹⁰ HURIPEC Report, 58.

continued to supply arms and other logistics. A report released by the Acholi religious leaders (ARLP) in 2002 confirmed this.⁷⁹¹

Sudan's support for the LRA also had the effect of deepening the political rift between the government and opposition members of parliament hailing from the region. Government believed that the war was not only fueled by Sudan and Acholi in the Diaspora but also by Acholi MPs, businessmen and the elite. Opposition politicians were accused of colluding with Sudan by, among others activities, leaking government military plans to the Kony and the Bashir government in Sudan.⁷⁹²

The years 2002 and 2003 marked the height of LRA rebel insurgency in northern Uganda. As noted earlier, in 2002 and 2003, the NRM government came up with what they called "Operation North and Operation Iron Fist",⁷⁹³ respectively. President Museveni was encamped in Gulu and then Soroti in Teso in order to oversee the operations himself. Both operations failed to damage the Lords Resistance Army rebels significantly. Instead, it flushed out the LRA rebels from their camps and hideouts in Southern Sudan to permanent residences on the doorsteps of the Acholi and her neighbours like Teso, West Nile and Lango sub-regions. The rebels were able to take advantage of this period to increase attacks on the population and further enhance their abductions of children. The result was that over 800,000 people were displaced

⁷⁹¹ *Acholi Religious Leaders Plan* (ARLD) Magazine, 27.

⁷⁹² Interview with Okello-Okello, 2007.

⁷⁹³ The operations involved heavy deployment of military hardware and infantry in Acholiland as if Uganda had been attacked by one of its neighbouring states. It involved a state of emergency where the army would arrest any suspected rebel collaborators and try them in military (Kangaroo) courts.

and this increased the pressure on the already over-crowded Internally Displaced Peoples Camps.⁷⁹⁴

As a response to the LRA attacks in Teso and Lango sub-region, the government began to rely on “Bow and arrow” groups, leading to the possible emergence of warlords in these localities. The use of ‘Bow and Arrow’ militia⁷⁹⁵ which first appeared in Soroti and Katakwi in Teso region, then spread to Lango where the local people demanded to be armed since the government had failed to defend them, first, from the Holy Spirit Movement forces of Alice Auma Lakwena and, later, the LRA of Joseph Kony. In mid August 2003, three ministers of government, including the Minister of State for Defence Ruth Nankabirwa, called on the people of Acholi to emulate the Iteso and Langi who decided to actively participate in the war. “She urged the people in displaced camps, local councils, and non-governmental organizations to persuade people “to join this crusade” of “bow and arrow” vigilantes.⁷⁹⁶ This clearly demonstrated that, at the height of the conflict, the NRM government had failed in its responsibility of defending the population and was, instead, trying to mobilize the victims of the conflict to engage in war. In this way, the conflict generalized into a culture of worriorism.

In addition, as the conflict took its toll on Teso, especially following the LRA massacre of innocent civilians at Obalim village in Katakwi in 2002, some

⁷⁹⁴ HURIPEC Report, 71.

⁷⁹⁵ These were ill-trained village vigilantes armed with local bows and arrows to defend the population from well-armed LRA rebels. In some cases like in Amuria in Teso, some of these ‘arrow boys’ began to use their new power to revenge against their different enemies and to fight for control of vast land areas in the area.

⁷⁹⁶ *The Daily Monitor*, Aug, 24, 2003.

leading figures in government, hailing from Katakwi and Soroti, called on the people to “kill any LRA collaborator or suspect above the age of 18”. They also called on the Iteso to attack “the Acholis” in their area and in Acholiland.⁷⁹⁷ Thus, what began as an ethnically inspired war in the Luwero triangle in Buganda was about to become a generalized ethnic war in the whole country.

After the death of LRA commander Brigadier Tabuleh, the LRA structure in Teso got disorganized. The LRA moved some of its units out of Teso into Lira.⁷⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the damage had been done and the epicentre of the humanitarian emergency had also shifted eastwards, albeit temporarily. In Acholiland, the effect of operation “Iron fist” flashed out the LRA from Southern Sudan only to increase their desperation and massacre of local people in Acholiland. The Mucwini massacre of July 24, 2002 was one case in point.

The LRA attack on Mucwini had disastrous and devastating consequences on the local people. The death toll was 56 men, women and children killed in the most violent ways. At the request of the victims, the first memorial prayer was organized with the help of Rev. Fr. Cena, a parish priest at Kitgum Catholic Mission, who asked the people to pray for the 56 people killed on 24 July 2002.⁷⁹⁹

Other massacres in the history of the conflict in Acholiland, for instance at Atiak and Barlonyo, remain officially unacknowledged by the government. The

⁷⁹⁷ *International Crisis Group Africa Report* 77, (14 April 2004), 8.

⁷⁹⁸ *International Crisis Group Africa Report* 77, (14 April 2004), 8.

⁷⁹⁹ *Sunday Monitor*, December 2008.

responsibility for the Mucwin and other massacres in Acholiland remains controversial and unresolved. Local informants and, especially, family members of some of the victims and survivors do not blame the LRA for the attack but the Uganda Peoples Defence Forces (UPDF) for failing to protect them. This has distanced the people of the area from the NRM government. Current Minister of Defence, Crispus Kiyonga, in a late apology to the people of Teso and Acholi sub-region (in 2006) said:

It is very sad for me to be here today to remember that very sad day when LRA rebels entered Teso, Acholi and Lango where they butchered people like chicken. I would like to apologize to the people of Teso, Acholi and Lango. It is because of government's failure to provide security that led to these deaths of innocent Ugandans at the hands of the LRA rebels.⁸⁰⁰

The local people also accuse the UPDF of contributing to the humanitarian crisis by raping women, sometimes killing civilians and failing to provide security in the camps.

The Mucwini Massacre of 24 July 2002 also exacerbated division among the local clans. The victims of this massacre were from various clans (Bura, Padibe, Akara, Pajong, Pubec, Lumelong, Yepa, Paimera, and Pachua). The massacre renewed disputes over land and other social issues like contested boundaries and past animosity over cattle, goat theft between two rival clans- the Pubec and the Pajong.⁸⁰¹ The dispute involves a contested claim that a Pubec man abducted by the LRA intentionally told them he was from the rival Pajong clan and then escaped with a gun, knowing that the LRA would retaliate against the

⁸⁰⁰ *The Daily Monitor*, July 17, 2006.

⁸⁰¹ *Sunday Monitor*, December, 7, 2008

Pajong. For this reason, whether true or not, surviving Pajong have not related well with the Pubec despite attempts by the Acholi cultural leader, Rwot Acan II, to reconcile them.⁸⁰²

The abductions and massacres associated with the LRA-UPDF war in Acholiand have left behind a scar of fear among the Internally Displaced People (IDPs). As Joseph Mazige notes in *The Daily Monitor* of Nov. 18 2008, “Mr. Gilbert Opio of Coo-pe Internally Displaced People’s Camp in Bungatira sub-county wants to return home. However, his wishes have not materialized because of uncertainty about government protection and the truth about LRA acceptance to sign a peace truce”. As he is quoted to have remarked:

We are confused over what to do. Kony is not reliable. He could be refusing to sign because he wants to come and terrorise us. Though the government has told us to go back, I am not sure of my security going by what I went through during the insurgency.⁸⁰³

Such fear is expressed by many IDPs across Acholiland and fear has become a major deterrent to development and post-war recovery of the area. The Kitgum Woman Member of Parliament, Beatrice Anywar Atim, shares the same sentiments with her electorate in various camps in the sub-region. As she emphasized, “this is a challenge at hand for those who care. There is a lot of untold truth and the people have all the reasons not to gain confidence despite the prevailing peace now in the sub-region.⁸⁰⁴” As a result, the Inter Agency Standing Committee estimates that only 24 percent of the former IDPs are back

⁸⁰² *Sunday Monitor*, December, 7, 2008.

⁸⁰³ *Daily Monitor*, Nov. 18, 2008, 14.

⁸⁰⁴ Interview on 20, November 2008.

in their villages of origin, 42 percent in transit areas 24 percent remaining in the camps in Acholi sub-region.⁸⁰⁵

The war also increased the people's mistrust for President Yoweri Museveni and especially his attitude towards the peace process as a way to end war. Reagan Okumu argues that the period of conflict has shown that "history repeats itself" on the grounds that Museveni sabotaged the peace process in Nairobi in 1985 between Tito Okello and his NRM and was not committed to the JUBA peace process of 2006⁸⁰⁶. Likewise, an elderly man, Charles Obwana in Unyama IDP, is quoted to have said that he could not return unless "I see Museveni and Kony shaking hands and hugging after the signing of the peace deal. Besides, there are no health centers, schools are far and no safe water and roads".⁸⁰⁷

The LRA insurgency also affected some other parts of the country like the West Nile region in economic ways. Such areas have suffered through loss of investment and higher costs due to insecurity along the roads to the region. Some of the costs that this region has suffered represent a net loss to the country rather than simply a displacement of activity to other regions. People living in the West Nile region (i.e. Arua, Moyo, Nebbi, Adjumani and Yumbe) have a vivid memory of their own conflictive past and the effects of LRA incursion into their areas, apart from the losses on the common routes to their areas. This region suffered immensely in the war that overthrew Idi Amin in

⁸⁰⁵ At the height of the conflict, at least 467 camps were created during the rebel insurgency that ravaged Acholi and Teso sub-region. For details see *Daily Monitor*, November 28 2008.

⁸⁰⁶ Interview Dec. 4, 2007, Kampala.

⁸⁰⁷ *Daily Monitor*, 18, Nov. 2008.

1979 and most of the population was in exile from 1988 to 1993 largely due to fear of ethnic reprisals and, when they returned, most of the infrastructure and most activities of the regional economy had been devastated. The people are, therefore, well-attuned to the conflict in Acholiland and acutely aware of its impact on their region.

Former Minister in the Amin regime, Brigadier Killi, in an interview in September 2007, divided the impact of the Acholi conflict on West Nile into four broad categories. These included its impact on development programmes and projects, on the cost of transport, on the quality of life and on the price of commodities that the region sells or “imports” from the south through their only road that the rebels planted landmines on.⁸⁰⁸ At each level, there is a direct and immediate impact and an indirect long-term impact. Overall, the conflict has had a strong negative impact on the region, which also translates into losses for the national economy. For instance, the Japanese government decided to stop its intended plan to rehabilitate three hospitals in Yumbe, Moyo and Adjumani from the 21 hospitals to be rehabilitated country-wide due to insecurity along the roads to the districts and the higher costs of transport. Indirect consequences of such a decision are poorer healthcare and less satisfactory levels of indicators of public health of the general population.⁸⁰⁹

All products coming into or leaving the region have to be transported on one of the two roads: Arua via Karuma-Pakwach (117kms) or Arua-Adjumani and Gulu

⁸⁰⁸ Interview-September 2007, Koboko.

⁸⁰⁹ “The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in Acholiland-Sub-region of northern Uganda” 18.

(97kms). Either way, all transport has to pass through Acholiland. During the height of insurgency and, hence, insecurity, between 2002 August to 2003, goods like Kenyan Cement which then cost 16,000 Uganda shillings elsewhere, cost 25,000/= in Arua, Sugar rose from 1500/= Ug shs to between 2500-3000/=810. Ordinary citizens also paid exorbitantly for products such as petrol, diesel, Kerosene, cooking oil and other essentials due to the insurgency.

Just as nearly all manufactured items consumed in the region came in by road, all the commodities produced in West Nile region were transported by road to Kampala and other markets through Acholiland. Insecurity affected petty traders and prices traders in the region were willing to offer for products farmers produce. Competition was then reduced as the number of traders willing to risk their vehicles and to come into the region to buy products declined as a consequence of the threat posed by fighting in Acholiland811. Trucks were sometimes delayed for between two to five days, as the roads were made secure and the risk of attack reduced.

This conflict also exposed the dictatorial nature of the NRM government and especially its negativity to free press. An independent voice, *The Monitor* Newspaper and Buganda Kingdom's Central Broadcasting FM Radio suffered most. When *The Monitor* Newspaper criticized the use of the "Bow and Arrow" groups to fight LRA, the president called the "newspaper an ally of Joseph Kony and the LRA and an enemy of the people of Uganda". He called the Bow and

⁸¹⁰ "The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in Acholiland Sub-region of northern Uganda",

⁸¹¹ Interview with Peter Ariko, 4 Sept. 2007, Luzira, Kampala.

Arrow groups, the country's reserve army and promised to "deal with the Monitor Newspaper".⁸¹² He also described opposition politicians critical to the handling of the northern conflict as rebel collaborators.

After the September 11, 2002, bombing of the World Trade Centre in the USA, the NRM government declared the LRA a terrorist organization partly as a way to solicit support from the USA. According to the then (UPDF) Army spokesman, Shaban Bantariza, "the term terrorism has to be distinguished from the term war". Whereas terrorism means the indiscriminate unleashing of violence against unarmed civilians, 'war' means 'conflict between belligerents'.⁸¹³ In these terms, the LRA was said not to be fighting the government but killing civilians. The Anti-terrorism Act was subsequently passed to deal with Kony and rebel collaborators, including the independent press and media houses like Buganda's Central Broadcasting Service.

In October 2002 a reporter from the newspaper and the Managing Editor were arrested because the newspaper reported that the LRA rebels in parts of Acholiland had shot down one of the new helicopter gunships which government had just procured⁸¹⁴. Instead of the army refuting this report or updating the nation on what had happened, the journalists were hurriedly arrested, and their news offices and publishing house closed for one week.

⁸¹²HURIPPEC Report, 75.

⁸¹³*The Monitor*, September 17, 2002.

⁸¹⁴*The Monitor*, September 17, 2002.

The 20 year insurgency in Acholiland created instability and caused untold suffering and the loss of countless lives. The humanitarian and social crisis, coupled with economic hardships, translated into a complex political question. While the NRM government has for many years failed to deliver a peaceful end to the conflict, the rag-tag insurgent forces, and especially the LRA, without a clear political agenda, have concentrated on-inflicting violence on innocent civilians, killing, looting, abducting and abusing children.⁸¹⁵

Conflict in Acholiland has also had far reaching political costs on Museveni and the ruling National Resistance Party. While Museveni has gained praise as a successful post-conflict reconstruction leader,⁸¹⁶ failure to contain the conflict in Acholiland has tarnished his otherwise admirable record. Many critics, for example Andrew Mwenda,⁸¹⁷ and Charles Onyango Obbo,⁸¹⁸ argue that Museveni has presided over a fairly peaceful and prosperous south, leaving northern Uganda to the dogs, Hence, he has ruled over a terribly divided country; more divided than ever before in history⁸¹⁹. Such critics assert that the war has brought out clearly Uganda's two distinct faces; the disgruntled North and the 'satisfied' "South".⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁵ S. Makara, "Uganda 2006 Multiparty Elections", 60. See also Adam Branch, "Neither Peace nor Justice: Political Violence and the Peasantry in Northern Uganda", in *African Study*, (2005). See also Chris Dolan, *What Do You Remember?* 13.

⁸¹⁶ *The New Vision*, **March** 10, 2006.

⁸¹⁷ Mwenda is a journalist and Managing Editor of *The Independent Magazine* critical of the political performance of Museveni. Also worked as editor with the Monitor Newspaper and has seen the inside of Luzira prison more than any other journalists in Uganda. Onyango-Obbo is a freelance journalist with the Daily Monitor.

⁸¹⁸ Onyang

⁸¹⁹ Makara S., "Uganda 2006 Multiparty Elections", 60.

⁸²⁰ P. Omach, "Conflict in Northern Uganda: The Elusive Search for Peace and Stability", Paper presented at the Pagwash workshop under the "Security Architecture in the House of Africa", (Nairobi, 17-19 March, 2006).

Besides, the conflict also became a booming business for army officers executing the war. Critics have argued that the longevity of the insurgency was a deliberate policy by government and its functionaries since it benefited them economically. Billions of shillings are drawn to pay soldiers who do not even exist. On 27 July 2003, it was announced that the president had, at the army High Command meeting held at the army headquarters-Bombo, ordered an inquiry into “ghost soldiers” on the army payroll. In the press release that accompanied the announcement, it was emphasized that the High Command had “received credible reports about the existence of ghost soldiers on the payroll”.⁸²¹

The human and social cost of the northern conflict is immeasurable. It is estimated that 1,167,000 people in northern and eastern Uganda live in squalid camps, 3500 people die daily from preventable diseases, extreme violence and torture.⁸²² The cost of the war over the last two decades is estimated at US dollars 1.3 to 1.7 billion (about US dollars 100 million per year).⁸²³ Despite this huge economic cost and the immense suffering of the people, attempts at a peaceful resolution have not been successful.⁸²⁴ As the conflict dragged on 20 years down, the Acholi people came to believe that the government of Uganda ended at Karuma Bridge. As Archbishop of Gulu, Baptist Odama said:

The Acholi people are now resilient to the situation and they bear it patiently because they have nowhere to go. To the Acholi people, Uganda ends at Karuma Bridge that divides

⁸²¹ *The Sunday Monitor*, July 30, 2003

⁸²² P. Omach, “Conflict in Northern Uganda: The Elusive Search for Peace and Stability”.

⁸²³ Oxfam Press Release 30, March 2006, Kampala Head Office.

⁸²⁴ At the time of writing this chapter, the JUBA peace attempt under Southern Sudan Vice President had failed and the NRM government in alliance with DRC and Southern Sudan decided to attack Kony bases at Garamba forests in Congo.

the north and south geographically. All they want is a movement of peace not (NRM)- National Resistance Movement.⁸²⁵

The political cost of the prolonged conflict in Acholiland has been diverse. First, there is belief that the NRM government under President Museveni has been reluctant to bring the war to an end because it has solid political support in central, western and parts of eastern Uganda and, therefore, does not value the north. As Aswa County Member of Parliament, Reagan Okumu argued:

Through the policy of divide and rule, the north has been used to sustain and justify the movement government's hold on power. In 2002, Operation Iron Fist came into force. This together with the slogan of terrorism is to smear all political opposition in Uganda; suppress them once and for all together with the LRA rebels and subdue the Acholi to support the movement and Museveni.⁸²⁶

This understanding of the situation is widespread amongst the people of Acholi.

The war situation has also been exploited, especially by opposition politicians to defeat the Yoweri Museveni's movement. In the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1996, 2001, and 2006, Museveni and the NRM have generally scored poorly in Acholiland, in particular, and the north, generally. In the presidential election of 1996, in Gulu alone, Museveni received only 8.5 percent of the vote, while Paul Semwogerere, the Democratic Party leader from Buganda; a region traditionally opposed to northern domination, got 90.5 percent. In Kitgum, Museveni obtained 10.5 percent and Semwogerere 88.4 percent. In

⁸²⁵ *The Daily Monitor*, 4 May 2005.

⁸²⁶ R. R. Okumu in *The Daily Monitor*, 16 July 2003.

2001, Museveni did slightly better with 11.5 percent. In Kitgum, Museveni won 21.3 percent, while Besigye secured 72.2 percent.⁸²⁷

During the 2006 elections, Museveni's little support in West Nile and Teso region was eroded by the opposition, clearly dividing the country into two distinct parts; the south and south-west for Museveni, while the whole of the North and a large section of the East was lost to the opposition, especially the new party, Forum For Democratic Change (FDC), formed by Kiiza Besigye.⁸²⁸

There is no doubt that the effects of the conflict in Acholiland and other parts like Teso have had a bearing on the popularity of the National Resistance Movement Party and its leadership. The voting in Acholiland since 1996 was not based on ethnic or religious politics but was a remarkably widespread protest vote against the National Resistance Movement and Museveni. The parliamentary election followed the same pattern.

At the local level, the Acholi generally perceived the continuation of the conflict as punishment for their refusal to endorse Museveni's leadership. They argued that the insurgency in the area provided the NRM with an ideal opportunity to keep northerners, in general; and Acholi, in particular, at the periphery of national politics and resource allocation. This situation has led to suspicion against the NRM and the failure of its programs in the area. One such government programme is the Security and Production Programme (SPP),

⁸²⁷ For a thorough analysis see The Directorate of Research, "Comparative Statistical Analysis of the 2001 and 1996 Presidential Elections", (Kampala: NRM Secretariat, 24 July 2001).

⁸²⁸ S. Makara, "Uganda's 2006 Multiparty Elections: Consolidating and Building Peace", 61.

introduced in May 2003. This was a programme designed as a transitional socio-economic effort to create better conditions for those in the Internally Displaced Peoples Camps (IDPs) of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts. Based on the experience of the Israel-Kibbutz and Moshau-system, the SPP was meant to use communal and government land to create farms called Security and Production Units (SPUs). The main crops grown would be maize, beans, upland rice and Sorghum. This programme caused tension among the IDPs who viewed it as a ploy by government to grab their land. Acholi politicians also argued that mass cultivation would destroy their traditional boundaries where ownership of land is not title based but passes through traditional inheritance.⁸²⁹

The failure of peace in Acholiland has also been used by the government to justify heavy expenditure on defence at the expense of poverty reduction ventures in northern Uganda. According to figures of the cost of military expenditure for the conflict in Acholiland, the government spent more than 300 billion Uganda shillings annually on defence; about 10 percent of locally raised government revenue since 2000.⁸³⁰ However, it is perceived within some quarters, especially by opposition politicians, that much of the money is used to fund NRM activities, such as elections. In addition, it is also argued that Museveni uses the war for divide and rule politics, whereby southerners and donor countries hail him as a champion of peace.⁸³¹

⁸²⁹ *International Crisis Group report 77*, 14 April 2004: 11

⁸³⁰ Background to the Budget-Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Kampala, 2002, (Unpublished)

⁸³¹ R.R. Okumu, *The Daily Monitor*, 16, July, 2003.

Acholiland, which has been a battlefield for the 20 year insurgency, has suffered devastating effects socially and economically. In the 20 years of conflict, children born in Acholiland have little grasp of Acholi cultural ways since all they have known is life in squalid camps. The elders have lost their important role of inculcating morals and Acholi norms to the youth. The elders are therefore increasingly being challenged to look at Acholi as a unit in place of the old clan-based structures which the war has disrupted by displacing people.⁸³²

Moreover, Acholi traditional ways of organizing the economy by pooling and sharing labour as well as food have been destroyed. This was largely because of the 20 years of insecurity in the Acholiland countryside and also because the population was then cramped in different internally created camps.⁸³³ Large tracts of land are left unattended, leading to wild vegetation growth that has even encouraged the spread of tsetse flies. An epidemiological report from the district surveillance team in Gulu states that “tsetse flies have heavily infested vast internally Displaced persons returnee areas in Omoro and Aswa counties in Gulu district forcing a number of people to flee back into camps where conditions are comparatively a little better.⁸³⁴ The report indicates that, Paicho, Palaro, Bungatira, Patiko, Pagik and Lalogi sub-counties, located in the forested belt of the district, are the most affected. The Gulu District Entomology officer Maya said his department does not have the capacity to contain the tsetse flies because it lacks the necessary equipment.⁸³⁵

⁸³² Interview with Hon. Okot-Ogong, December 2007- Lira Town.

⁸³³ *HURIPCE Report*, 78.

⁸³⁴ *Daily Monitor*, 25, September 2008.

⁸³⁵ *Daily Monitor*, 25, September 2008.

Furthermore, in the internally Displaced Peoples Camps, the concentration of up to 450,000-800,000 rural people in one place has had dramatic effects on the surrounding environment and resources; particularly the soil. Average camp size, according to data in mid-2000 by Willet Weeks,⁸³⁶ is 12,800 persons. Where a rural population, cooking with fuel wood and charcoal and wanting to grow crops to supplement their food supplies, is concentrated in a small area, dramatic environmental degradation is to be expected. Meanwhile, on the outskirts of the camps, contamination from fecal material and urine must have been massive.

It is reported that in some places that within a 2 hour walking distance of 7 kms, all trees; including fruit trees like mangoes, were cut down for fuel. With no other economic activity, large numbers of people, estimated at 1 percent of the population or about 5000 people, engaged in making charcoal and cutting firewood for sale; each using approximately 5 hectares per year over the 20 years of conflict.⁸³⁷ Some land in the region was rendered useless by anti-personnel land mines.

As the conflict dragged on, only the few rich people in Acholiland could afford to send their children to schools outside Acholiland. Formal education in the villages was seriously affected by the conflict. Other social values of the Acholi society were also affected. The Acholi people love dancing and cultural festivals. These have been undermined by camp life where there is nothing to celebrate

⁸³⁶ S.S. Kayunga, "The Impact of Armed Opposition on the Movement System in Uganda", 113.

⁸³⁷ Interview with Forest Officer –Gulu, November 2007.

but only much to agonise about. Traditional religious life of the Acholi has been interfered with and has been undermined and traditional religious shrines have been destroyed. The destruction of shrines has also undermined the conciliatory role of elders. The 2000 report of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) working in Acholiland notes that:

The conflict situation has drastically undermined elements of social and cultural lives of the Acholi people, as well as bringing new challenges. The active roles of the traditional leaders and chiefs have been eroded. The young generation being brought up in the camps do not know the Acholi culture any more. This phenomenon of internal displacement has further exacerbated the problem resulting in the breakdown of the whole traditional social system, marital breakdown and family separation, moral degeneration and all that is characterized in the Acholi culture. Cherished Acholi rich African culture will never be the same again in the social and cultural context.⁸³⁸

The above statement speaks volumes by itself. Even if the NRM/A did not intend it, they are partly to blame for putting the people of Acholi in the situation described above.

Asked how these problems could be overcome, many respondents advised that these aspects of cultural degeneration could only be addressed in a proper home setting but not in the existing Internally Displaced Peoples Camps (IDPs). Others argued that only foreign intervention could help stop the war in order for the Acholi culture to be rejuvenated, while some elite argued that the only solution to the conflict is Museveni relinquishing political office as president.

⁸³⁸ This and other details on the socio-cultural effects of the war can be found in a brief paper on the situation in the North presented by James Otto; chairperson Gulu District Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Gulu, Uganda, (2003, Unpublished).

From the economic angle, the conflict has compounded the impoverishment of the Acholi community. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics estimates that almost 67 percent of the population in northern Uganda in general live below the “poverty line” The main cause of poverty in this region is said to be the persistent insecurity in the region, especially in Acholiland and Karamoja.⁸³⁹ This poverty is not only due to the uneven development of the country that colonial policy promoted but also of the concerted looting that took place immediately after the NRM/A came to power in 1986. Member of Parliament for Arua Municipality Akbar Godi emphasizes that the NRA looted domestic animals such as cattle, goats, chicken, food granaries, and, in some instances, destroyed whole households. The Karamojong cattle rustling activities into Acholi only exacerbated the situation.⁸⁴⁰

Acholiland, like other regions in the north (i.e. Karamoja, Teso and Lango), was largely a cattle based economy. Cattle were a source of power and prestige and a store of wealth. According to data from Veterinary officers at Gulu and Kitgum, in 1985, the cattle population in these two areas stood at 285,000. Cattle raids and looting reduced the herd considerably. In 1997, the combined herd for both districts was estimated at 5000 heads; less than 2% of the original number. By 2006, the figure has not changed much (i.e. 5200).⁸⁴¹ The replacement cost of the plundered cattle herd was estimated at US dollars 25 million. As Gersony notes:

In an instant, the Acholi farmers were deprived of the milk their cows provided, the additional acreage and higher yields

⁸³⁹ HURIPEC Report, 70.

⁸⁴⁰ Interview Nov. 2007- Arua.

⁸⁴¹ Gulu and Kitgum Districts Annual Report, 1998.

which their oxen permitted them, their fall back for marriage dowries and education, and the savings which carried them through drought, hard times, like sickness and old age.⁸⁴²

The war situation and the looting also disrupted the cultural functions and self respect that cattle ownership was associated with among the Acholi. This makes it one of the greatest economic blows of the war in Acholi. Today (2006); after public and private restocking efforts, cattle numbers have risen to a little over 5000 herds of cattle. Reduction in the goat and sheep population, each estimated at about 100,000, was drastic, and though their numbers have since improved, particularly for goats (now over 50,000), they have not reached pre-conflict levels.⁸⁴³

In terms of human cost, the impoverishment of the people has led to extensive malnutrition of both children and adults, resulting in high mortality rates, especially among children. Apart from the abduction by the different rebel groups; especially the LRA rebels and the enhanced recruitment of children in government controlled armies and different kinds of para-military groups like the “Arrow boys”, the children of Acholi have also suffered in other ways. As for the babies born under IDP conditions, they have experienced more stunted growth than the national average, with figures of up to 52 percent of stunted children compared to the national average of 38 percent.⁸⁴⁴ In all reports, the high level of poverty, malnutrition and stunted growth are attributed to impoverishment as a result of the twenty-year conflict. Children who are

⁸⁴² R. Gersony, *The Anguish of Northern Uganda*, 20-36.

⁸⁴³ Interview with Veterinary Officer-Gulu –2007.

⁸⁴⁴ *HURIPPEC Report*, 71.

impoverished and malnourished over long periods never recover fully and may suffer permanent damage, affecting their mental and physical productivity⁸⁴⁵.

The World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that in the Anaka and Pabbo camps in Gulu district, malnutrition of the encamped population stood at the levels of 31 and 18 percent of the population in terms of global acute malnutrition. The continued conflict has had the consequence of worsening the food supply situation. According to the 2001 report of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), out of the five (5) IDP camps in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts, there had been a drastic fall in food production of cereals such as maize and rice due to the forced displacement of the population in these areas.⁸⁴⁶ As one respondent put it:

We were forced by government soldiers (UPDF) to assemble in trading centers and then to move to displaced persons' camps. In areas where people resisted, villages are shelled by UPDF. We left our fields and food ready for harvest.⁸⁴⁷

In Odek, where Joseph Kony hails from, the people were given a 48 hour ultimatum to leave their villages and move into gazetted camps in order to deprive the LRA of local support and recruits. This resulted in over 800,000 of the population confined in IDP camps becoming dependent on food aid provided by World Food Programme (WFP). Whilst only 110,000 to 240,000 people were being provided with 30 percent of their food requirements in 1996, at the height of the conflict in 2003, more than one million people needed such support for

⁸⁴⁵ W. Willet, *Pushing the Envelope*, 60.

⁸⁴⁶ *International Committee of the Red Cross Report, 2001.*

⁸⁴⁷ Interview, 30 November, 2007.

100 percent of their food requirements.⁸⁴⁸ In May 2003, Action Against Hunger (ACF-USA) completed a national survey of 21 IDP camps in Gulu district alone, which revealed that 88 per cent of the camp population depended entirely on food aid. All this was the result of the fact that the people were not allowed to access their land to grow crops. In the camps, the Acholi people were controlled and registered in various ways by the Ugandan army and government officials, as well as by International agencies and organisations. Food and relief distributions to them are perhaps the most glaring examples of how dependence is created.

Apart from people living in camps, there are those who live in abject poverty in the areas surrounding the towns. Some of them flock to missions and churches to seek refuge there because of the deplorable conditions in the camps. Since the churches were unable to feed them, they become a permanent sore in these areas where they could not even be provided with food aid.⁸⁴⁹ When the congestion and health conditions become unmanageable, the church authority have to evict them just to keep the churches functioning. Those evicted end up becoming squatters in squalid locations around the municipality and small towns; constructing any kind of shelter in any available space, using materials ranging from sacks and reeds to grass thatched huts to accommodate themselves.⁸⁵⁰ The situation was made worse by the fact that those assembled in these areas were not regarded by the government as eligible for food

⁸⁴⁸ "World Food Programme Report on Northern Uganda", (Kampala, 2003, Unpublished).

⁸⁴⁹ Interview with Bishop Onono-Onweng- 15th June 2007.

⁸⁵⁰ Chairman Local Council five (5) Norbet Mao attributes cholera outbreak in Gulu Town in 2007, August to this rather pathetic situation. He also defended municipal authorities accused of not doing a lot to clean the town on grounds that they were overwhelmed by the population of such refugees at the height of the rebellion in 2003.

assistance. The effects of these developments on the people of Acholi were indescribable. For instance, the number of mentally sick people has greatly increased in the town areas due to stress. In Gulu hospital alone, at the height of the war and insecurity, trauma became the number three cause for hospital admission in addition to gun-shot wounds, panga wounds, landmine injuries.⁸⁵¹ The cost of treating such patients becomes an additional on government expenditure, leading to budgetary constraints.

Most of the abductees who managed to regain their freedom in different ways also suffer from psychological trauma. This problem is also faced by the entire Acholi population in different degrees as a result of the twenty year war. Girls abducted in 1996, Acan Grace (then 14 years), Charlotte Awino (then 16 years) and Akello Janet (then 16 years), still recall with sadness how killing was the crux of their initiation into LRA rebel family. Owino George, a rehabilitation counselor at Gulu, narrates how all new recruits were forced to murder within the first week of their abduction; not only to illustrate to them the peril of trying to escape but also to make escape psychologically difficult since they had been converted into murderers and would fear to associate with other normal people outside the rebel family.⁸⁵² The conflict in Acholiland has had impact on the collective mental health of the population in the region; so much because of its intensity and persistence in the 20 years between 1986 and 2006. Available data on funding for health in Acholiland is difficult to obtain. However, AVSI

⁸⁵¹ “The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in Acholiland Sub-region of northern Uganda”, See also *Huripec Report, Human Rights Watch Report*, (2003).

⁸⁵² *New Vision*, 20th September 2008, 9.

invested between 10-15 million dollars in the region between 2002 and 2006; most of it in health.⁸⁵³

According to Gulu Local Council Chairman, Five-Norbert Mao, most donors have avoided the region, preferring to operate in regions where access is easier and security better. As a result, there is a large disparity between funding for health in Acholiland and funding going into other regions where problems are less severe. This situation may change in the future as the security situation in the area normalizes and new donors start taking an interest in the sub-region. The main hospital in Gulu, LACOR hospital, normally has a budget of 2.5 billion Uganda shillings. However, according to Chairman Norbet Mao, expenditure on war victims and associated health care costs necessitated by the conflict make it impossible to provide basic health care to the population with this budget⁸⁵⁴. Other hospitals and health care institutions are also struggling to meet the costs of the conflict and to provide adequate care for the patients who find the way to their doors.

A study conducted by Medicines Sans Frontiers (MS-Uganda), a non-governmental organization, indicated that the war in northern Uganda had by 2002 already cost the country 26 million dollars or 10 percent of the country's economic output (GDP).⁸⁵⁵ The study also highlights that the conflict caused major economic disruption and human suffering. The country's draft Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) of August 2004 put the cost of the conflict in

⁸⁵³ The Association of Volunteers in International Service, Report, 2006, Unpublished.

⁸⁵⁴ Interview-August 2007.

⁸⁵⁵ A. Bainomugisha & G. Tumushabe, *The Torturous Peace Process in Northern Uganda*, 6.

Acholiland at 3 percent of GDP,⁸⁵⁶ although the figures could be much higher if one computed the human losses. This conflict has diverted government spending from social services such as roads, health, education, and other economic sectors to military spending.

The war has been responsible for not only poverty and loss of economic assets, but also the spread of HIV. As the Health Superintendent Gulu hospital put it, “sex has become a commodity in Gulu; and in many areas, the only people with money are soldiers. In a ‘buyers’ market, women and girls have little choice in making sure that condoms are used. Rape; particularly by soldiers of the UPDF and LRA is common and has gone largely unpunished”.⁸⁵⁷ The LRA abductees were also infected. An article in *New Vision Newspaper* (2005), quoting GUSCO, stated that 85 percent of the female abductees who returned were affected by sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. Population movement and displacement of people also helped to exacerbate HIV/AIDS spread. Gulu is now one of the worst affected districts (4th of all the 90 districts in the country) with a reputed 16 percent of the population affected.⁸⁵⁸

The conflict in Acholiland has contributed to immeasurable loss of life through other diseases like tuberculosis, especially in the IDPs, Diarrhoea due to poor sanitation problems especially in the squalid camps, skin diseases and tropical ulcers. Delayed treatment due to lack of the necessary medicines and equipment has further compounded the situation.

⁸⁵⁶ Draft Poverty Eradication Plan Report, Kampala, August, 2004, Unpublished.

⁸⁵⁷ Interview 2007- Gulu Hospital.

⁸⁵⁸ “The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in the Acholiland Sub-region of northern Uganda”.

Other affected sectors that impact on the national economy are tourism and production of cash crops like tobacco. In 2001, tourism accounted for almost a quarter (or 24.9 percent) of export revenues.⁸⁵⁹ In the 20 years of NRM administration, tourism should have been much farther along than it is and should have contributed much to GDP. For almost 20 years rebels took refuge in the main National Parks (i.e. Kidepo National park, and Murchison Falls National park) and this affected the industry adversely. The murder of 11 students at Murchison Falls Park and several tourists in western Uganda was widely reported internationally.⁸⁶⁰ This greatly scared off tourists.

Foreign exchange was also lost due to the conflict because the region produces most of the country's tobacco and cotton. Virtually all tobacco, 98% or more, for export comes from northern Uganda. The consequences of the conflict in Acholiland are, therefore, not entirely restricted to Acholiland even if the Acholi have felt the brunt of war more than any other community in Uganda. The level of poverty in northern Uganda has increased and strengthened the north-south divide that has characterized Uganda since independence.

Conclusion

After 20 years of fear, displacement, dislocation and disempowerment, Gulu, Kitgum and Pader (that constitute Acholiland) represent a society in crisis. Although the Acholi people have been hailed for their resilience⁸⁶¹, the intense

⁸⁵⁹ "The Net Economic Cost of the Conflict in the Acholiland Sub-region of northern Uganda".

⁸⁶⁰ 10 students of Jimmy Sekassi Institute were cruelly murdered; allegedly by rebels of Lords Resistance Army while on a study tour of the Murchison Park in 2003.

⁸⁶¹ In an address to a gathering in Gulu celebrating the return of peace at PECE, Stadium (9/10/2008), Bishop Odama of Gulu Archdiocese praised the Acholi for their resilience.

pressure of living in the midst of a conflict over such a sustained period of time has taken a massive toll over them.

As the war continued between 1986 and 2006, families were forced to make impossible choices and to live with the shame of abduction, whether as abductees returning and trying to come to terms with the guilt of atrocities they committed or as families trying to re-integrate their ex-rebel children into normal life.

The consequences of the war have continued to perpetuate grievances that are, in turn, identified as the cause of the conflict. Both the conflict and the way the conflict has been portrayed as Acholi affair by some politicians, has generated a feeling of marginalisation that serve to perpetuate the conflict. The North-South divide is today more real and feasible than the British left it in 1962.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study has argued that conflict in post-colonial Acholiland is largely a product of the political dynamics of successive post-colonial regimes, including the extensive manipulation of politicized ethnicity and ethnic stereotyping.

It has maintained that the conflict that has bedeviled post-colonial Uganda is largely about political power and that it has been the tragedy of Ugandan politics that violence became a solution of first, rather than last resort, in which every war could be justified since it was always embedded in the country's

history of revenge and ethnic retaliation. At the core of the conflict lies the failure of consecutive Ugandan leaders to construct and consolidate a modern state that legitimizes and promotes collective aspirations, and to wield the magnitude and levels of power a modern state conveys, other than by divide and rule tactics.

Whereas it is true that after establishing the multi-ethnic state of Uganda, the British colonialists made no effort to forge its inhabitants into one unified and viable political entity, much blame should be laid on Uganda's post-colonial leaders and their failure to act differently after over 40 years of independence. Instead, post-colonial leaders in Uganda invented their own version of "divide and rule" where more attention and economic resources were given to members of their own ethnic community than to the nation at large. In such cases, ethnicity was used to obtain and use state power in order to gain access to scarce resources commanded by the state. This, in turn, generated ethnic rivalry and competition which led to conflicts. As Brass observes, "by monopolizing access to cabinet posts and top positions in the military and parastatal enterprises, dominant groups stir up ethnic hostilities thereby provoking coups and conflicts".⁸⁶²

Conflict in Uganda is largely as a result of such misrepresentation of political power and ethnicization of politics. It is true that ethnicity is neither immutable nor inherently conflictual. However, it becomes politically dangerous when and

⁸⁶² Quoted in J. Auvinen, "Political Conflict in Less Developed Countries, 1988-89", in *Journal of Peace Research*, 34, 2 (1997), 177-195.

where people are mobilized on the basis of objective characteristics such as culture, language, and territory. In such a situation, ethnicity becomes an instrumental and a destructive feature in a country's politics. The history of conflicts in Uganda is rich in examples where ethnicity has been instrumentalized.

Conflict in Acholiland (1986-2006) has exposed all the dangers associated with politicization and manipulation of ethnicity. Many Acholi claim that they have been singled out and treated by the NRM government as targets of state violence because of their numerical majority in the army of former President Milton Obote. The Museveni regime has not done much to allay their fears. Instead, many commanders and President Museveni himself explain the conflict as an Acholi affair on account that 'it is the cultural background of the people here, they are genetically violent'⁸⁶³ and, therefore, don't see the conflict as part of Uganda's history where the gun has been used more frequently to solve political differences. Since the inception of the Uganda state in 1962, ethnic rivalry has been exacerbated by those in top political leadership position. Ever since Obote attacked the Buganda Kingdom in 1966 (1966 Crisis), the country has not healed as successive leaders have not been sincere in their dealing with the different ethnic groups beyond exploiting ethnic differences to retain power.

History has taught Ugandans some painful and costly lessons in the political theory of the modern state; notably that rulers will not necessarily serve their constituents, that power corrupts, and that whole societies decay when force is

⁸⁶³ This statement was made by the then Army Commander-James Kazini.

used for private benefit. Tragedies, such as the twenty-year old conflict in Acholiland can only be avoided when both leaders and citizens understand the cost of using the gun to settle political differences and are willing to genuinely compromise and share, even when they have the power to take everything.

The conflict in Acholiland also demonstrates that once an entire ethnic group is stereotyped or singled out for repression because of the assumed mistakes of a few (in this case Obote, Okello and Acholi soldiers), repression will automatically generate opposition and lead to a civil war. Whereas the National Resistance Army/Movement regarded the southerners as brothers and integrated most of their political and military leaders into their regime change programmes, it viewed the northerners; the Acholi in particular as enemies of change to be forcefully conquered. By so doing the NRM/A re-invented the repressive practices of its predecessors. The cost of doing this has been the 20 year conflict that destroyed Acholiland and has cost the country dearly economically. Unless the process of genuine reconciliation and ethnic purges are stopped, Uganda will not heal and conflicts are bound to continue or re-occur.

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